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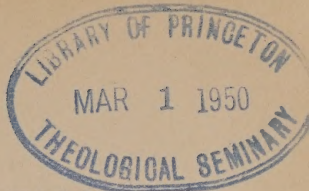
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The gospel of Christ

A. T. Sprague -
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THE



GOSPEL OF CHRIST

BY

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“What we want to make us right is only Faith—a true, veritable, actual belief that God does all things; and that the thing He does is that good thing. Then all is right. What perplexes you is that Christ is speaking, and you are thinking wrongly. Is it not evident that *we* want altering, and nothing else?”

TO THE READER.

BE sure on taking up this book to ask God to bless it to thy heart. When thou findest something beyond thee or strange to thy experience, do not hastily condemn it. Rather pray the Blessed Spirit to show thee if it is agreeable to Holy Scripture, and welcome anything that stirs thee to think steadily over the only realities. On laying it down turn what has helped thee into a new motive for goodness and action, remembering that truth is both a power and a trust.

A. W. T.

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To facilitate the reading of this book in small portions, the subjects, as they occur, are noted in the side notes, and the first word of the different sections is marked by an initial letter.

*"Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldst believe,
thou shouldest see the glory of God?"*

PREFACE.



MODERN critic of exquisite wit and culture, with a taste for theology, which tempts him to make excursions into it, occasionally with more vivacity than success, has defined "Salvation" to be "a harmonious perfection only to be won by unreservedly cultivating many sides in us."

St. Paul on the other hand tells us that the Saviour's work was "to redeem us from all iniquity"; and when we reflect on the moral condition of the world, and observe that for the countless millions the absorbing struggle is to get bread, it becomes clear, that at least some of the sides in us, which, from an artist's point of view, need cultivation, may have a long time to wait for it.

Conscience claims precedence of taste. Nevertheless the irony that sparkles in this

sentence should not blind us to the truth that it contains.

Gospel is a large word; and if it really is what it calls itself, it should be able to tell us, not only how to escape penalties, but how to win righteousness; how to live, as well as how to die; what we may enjoy, as well as what we must surrender. Surely it is a morose religionism that fears knowledge, or distrusts science, or condemns music, or despises art. All these things have been, are, ought to be, and will be used, and perhaps increasingly, as handmaids of the Church's ministry, and for the innocent delight of the intelligent. Only, they do not make Heaven, or reveal God.

We are bound, according to our opportunities, to make the best of ourselves, and to be complete. To suppose that faculties have been given us, which we are not meant to employ, or tastes which it is unsuitable to cultivate, is to accuse our Maker of injustice and folly. The Gospel nowhere discourages our being complete; but it would have our perfection in due equipoise and order. Each man's own spirit ought to be a well-furnished kingdom, in which, with a dignity that will

ever be in exact proportion to his self-culture, he will bear the burden of his own being, and lend a helping hand for his neighbour's.

Life too, the patient and universal teacher, has its various zones of experience, and in each of them we are at school with our Father. Sometimes we feel to be dwelling in a sluggish lagoon oozing through sunny flats of marsh and osier beds. Then the scene changes, and it is an alpine valley, where jagged peaks lose themselves in frozen vapour, and gloomy ravines, never rosy with the dawn, depress us with their indescribable solitude.

Lét us be sure that our Heavenly Father speaks to us all in turn, as and when we need Him. We will listen to His voice and humbly cherish it, for His messages are not to be kept secret, but to be passed on. Single souls, who have to work out our own salvation, we are also incorporated into the Communion of Saints. By truth as well as by conduct we are to be "members one of another"; and what it is a joy to possess, it may be a sin to conceal.

SELSDON PARK, CROYDON,

December 30, 1881.

I.

LIFE.

INTRODUCTION.

"THIS IS THE RECORD, THAT GOD HATH GIVEN UNTO US ETERNAL LIFE; AND THIS LIFE IS IN HIS SON."

"When I speak of Eternal Life, I mean nothing else than that life which is in God, which makes God to be infinitely blessed. To say that God gives man Eternal Life, is to say that God gives man to partake of that which is His own blessedness."



WHO understands these words, or believes them, or much more, uses them? Understands them in their inexhaustible profoundness, pursues them into their final issues, believes them in their ineffable gladness, uses them for their supernatural grace? They are so deep, that no one has ever plumbed them; so full, that theology, which is simply the Church's growth in the apprehension of the

Introduction.

Divine mind and will, is virtually anticipated in them; so wonderful, that most men pass them by as too good to be true; so potent with life and grace, that the Christian has often to ask himself if they are really meant for him. Plainly, if they are true, they are the entire Gospel; containing all we need to know about God, and Christ, and ourselves; not what may be ours to-morrow, but what is given to us to-day—whether we know or care.

WHAT is this life? Not of course physical. Though *Nature of it.* all life is essentially one in its source, because ultimately derived from the creative force of God and continually sustained by His will. An oyster spat, and a Bengal tiger, Shakespeare conceiving "Othello," and the angel of the Apocalypse, whose face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire, severally represent life, as He creates and manifests it in the organs where He wills it to be. The life of the intellect and the senses had already developed and exhausted itself before Christ was born. No one has ever surpassed Plato for serene and profound speculation. No one

has tried harder than Tiberius to drain the possibilities of wicked enjoyment, or better succeeded in finding it to be Hell. St. John is speaking of the life of the Spirit; which, of course, existed among men before the Incarnation, though imperfectly, and with limitations. "I am come," said Christ, "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" [John x. 10].

THIS life is spiritual, having *The life*
its scope and residence in *spiritual.*
man's spirit. Its birth-time is regeneration, its condition faith, its evidence holiness, its outcome the invisible Church, the pattern of its conduct Christ's human life on earth. In essential accordance with individual faculty and character, it finds—ordained for it by the wisdom of the Divine Sovereignty—its manifold types of existence, modes of expression, occasions of growth, measures of grace. Like all other kinds of life, it has its eras and crises and transitions. Yet its youth is not of necessity immature or hysterical, and its riper years must expect no immunity from surprises or decay. Its law is progress, its liberty obe-

dience, its strength the joy of God, its wine hope, its beauty meekness. It is at its best when it hungers for God Himself above and beyond His ordinances or His gifts, His unveiled face or His felt presence. Severe with itself, it is gentle and tender with others; most healthy when least self-conscious; effecting most when it feels that but little is done.

IT is also eternal. There is *Eternal.*
a great deal about eternal life in the Bible. St. John tells us that "it was with the Father, and was manifested unto us" [1 John i. 2]. He had seen it. Christ Himself says about it, that it consists in the knowledge of the Father, and of Himself as sent by the Father, and revealing Him. Indeed, it is the life which God Himself lives, in which He has willed, created, and loved from all Eternity, whose thought is truth, and its effect light and its nature love. As truth it contains, declares, *is* the expression and idea of all things. As light it is the manifesting power, which doth and must make manifest by the very force and acting of its nature.

As love, it is that which cannot be content with its own separate existence and felicity, but which finds its joy and satisfaction even at the cost of unspeakable sacrifice, in going out of itself to do, give, or suffer for others. As it relates to God, it is His very own life, and light, and blessedness, the formal though inadequate expression of His energy and perfections. As it refers to man, it is Divine truth for his understanding, to quicken and penetrate it; Divine righteousness for his conscience, bringing God to deal with him, and speak face to face with him there; Divine power for his will to subdue and transform it; Divine love to his heart, showing him how he is loved, and enabling him to love in return. A life, moreover, about which it has been said by One, who knows, that we cannot dispense with it. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" [1 John iii. 3].

THIS eternal life is the gift *The Gift of*
of God. Here is the Gos- *God.*

pel in a single sentence. We can earn death if we will—"The wages of sin is death"—

[Rom. vi. 23]. But the apostle adds that life, if had at all, must be had through giving. It is given, and no impracticable conditions modify its freeness, diminish its fulness, or dilute its joy. It is given by God, who knows what He is doing, and those for whom He is doing it; Who does not give away either what does not exist, or what does not belong to Him; Who, though He never forces His gifts on any one, will do His best to persuade and help us to receive them; Who waits, and hopes, and continually watches over us, lest we receive them in vain. What is even more to the purpose, the gift is not something that *may* be given, or *shall be*: *it has been given*. While we are right to expect for its growing development, and entire fruition, the gift is ours now, so far as the giving it can make it so, and it is for us to decide, when we choose to possess it, by claim and use.

This is a gift for the race, *A gift for the*
 “God so loved the world,” *race.*
 said Jesus to the Pharisee [John iii. 16]. St. John elsewhere explains, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also

for the sins of the whole world" [1 John ii. 1]. A gospel indeed! This is a wonderful truth seldom and imperfectly comprehended, stirring questions which we need not fear to displease God by reverently wishing to get answered, though, indeed, He is not bound to answer them, if we cannot comprehend the answer; involving also the tremendous responsibility of the Church as her Lord's spouse and witness for a world, which He was crucified to save. There is an odd confusion in many minds between the entirely distinct acts of giving and receiving, and the notion prevails that unless a gift is accepted, it has not actually been bestowed. But the giver's purpose and act are one thing; his, to whom he gives, another. While it is true that a gift cannot actually *become* ours till we have personally appropriated it, the fact that it has been placed at our disposal, means a responsibility about it which we can neither modify nor escape. The title deeds of our eternal inheritance are placed at any rate before those who hear the Gospel. While God willeth all men to be saved, He forces Himself on none.

“**T**HIS life is in His Son.” *This life is in Christ.*
Now, do you wonder that

the Church declares so resolutely, and holds so tenaciously, the Godhead of Christ? “As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself”

[John v. 26]. Surely we may ask, how could Eternal life be said to be in Him, were He only man? This life resides in His Incarnate Person, and while it comes to us through our spiritual union with Him, it is maintained and nourished, and enlarged, and matured in us, in exact proportion to the vitality and closeness of our fellowship. Personal, vital, conscious fellowship with Christ means, and imparts everything, both of the life we enjoy, the grace we receive, the communion we partake, and the security we possess. To those out of Christ nothing is promised. In Him we have the fulness of God.

BUT how is this life impart- *How it is im-*
ed, and how does the soul *parted.*

assimilate it, and how is the Church to pass it on the world?

God, who has made body, soul, and spirit

recognizes what He has made, in His methods of visiting us; neither ignores the senses in educating the spirit; nor the material in approaching the invisible. There is the WORD by which He conveys the ideas, and principles, and promises, and precepts of the Gospel to the understanding. The SACRAMENTS have been ordained to be the objective, effective, and continuous signs and seals of His grace to faithful souls. In the COMMUNION OF SAINTS, by contact of ideas, interchange of experience, and the holy beatitude of common worship the faithful mutually edify each other into the One Body of Christ.

What Holy Scripture was to the human soul of our Lord* the Gospels indicate; but few of us, judging from our conduct, adequately appreciate it. Evidently it was His habitual solace and delight, the invisible and delectable food of His vexed and weary spirit, the sword and shield of His continual resistance to the Tempter, the shadow of a great rock in the weary land of His life. In nothing is the example of Christ more notable or

* See "Gospel of the Nineteenth Century," chapter iii.

important, than the way in which He quoted Scripture and appealed to it, whether to refute or confirm. "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures" [Matt. xxii. 29] was (to the Jews) His touchstone of error [Matt. iv. 4]. "It is written" (in His Temptation), was the foundation that made Him sure. "Being born again, by the Word of God," here is St. Peter's account of the regenerating power of the Word of Inspiration [1 Pet. i. 23]. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," is St. Paul's account of it to the mixed Church at Rome [Rom. x. 17]. But the Sacraments are the solemn ordinances of Christ for the Church of which He is the head. Nothing is more intelligible than the controversy which for so many generations has raged with more or less intenseness over their right value and use. No religious system that fails to combine a reverent appreciation of the Sacraments, as Divinely ordered means of grace, with a clear and unyielding demand for a personal faith rightly and dutifully to receive them, will ever adequately reconcile the plain statements of Scripture, or satisfy the religious instincts of mankind.

IN Baptism God admits us
into visible fellowship with *Baptism.*

Himself, seals to us our adoption to be sons, welcomes us into the vast household of faith embraces us with the arms of His mercy, pledges to us all the favour, help, and protection we can ever need, incorporates us into the Body mystical of His Son. It is as if He spake as follows: "My redeemed children, at the earliest possible moment, I invite you to be at home in my heart. I will care for you, and watch over you, speak to you as soon as you can understand me, and gradually instruct you as you are able to receive my truth. It is a big house into which I admit you, with many rooms in it, and those whom you will meet are of all sorts, ages, and degrees. That you are here at all is both a mark of my love, which you will do well to remember, and a pledge of my grace, which some day you may be glad to plead. I am your Father to begin with, through my love, not your worthiness. Let my name soothe, and guide, and convince, and sustain you in dark hours to come. Prove yourselves my children by your dutiful and ready obedience; and you will find that your

baptismal privilege covers and implies all your life can need."

Holy Communion.


The Lord's Supper is a perpetual memorial of His Atoning Sacrifice, a feast of praise and thanksgiving, a special means of uniting with His Glorified Person, through the food of His body slain upon the Cross, for all who humbly cleave to Him, the dear promise of His glorious return. Here we receive our Saviour into our hearts, once more to hear the Gospel of our pardon, to get our will stirred, our conscience cleansed, our hunger fed, our will invigorated for duty and conflict, our hearts consoled with the assurance of His most precious love. If about this Sacrament there is a superstitious faith, which we must repudiate, there may be also a feeble and limp faith, which may not be far from sin. If only our will is towards Him, and we hold fast by His Word, our dulness or chilliness, at the moment of approaching His table, shall not discredit His everlasting promise: "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" [John vi. 55].

WHEN there is the Com- *Communion of*
munion of Saints, where- *Saints.*

by through the atmosphere, ideal, and activity of the corporate life of the Church, the personal life of each separate member is quickened, edified, and matured. We Christians of this modern time* cannot even guess how we grieve Christ, surprise the angels, defraud our brethren, and impoverish ourselves by reserve and unsociableness and mental sluggishness about our most holy faith. Had the Apostolic age had to steer the Church through ice-fields, as we have, her influence might never have penetrated beyond the basin of the Mediterranean. If converts in our mission fields to-day were to be chilled by our apathy, or paralyzed by our reserve, one of the Church's greatest motive forces would be lost. It is not indeed religious gossiping that we want, nor facile chattering at all times and places over the mysteries of God, nor unbecoming self-revelations, nor egotistic confessions—so often but sly traps for praise—but, if we would be Christians of the Pauline type, we need more

* See, for a further development of this subject, cap iii., p. 93.

of a direct personal Christianity in our individual friendships, more readiness for the reading of God's Word with intimate friends and neighbours, more seeking and using of opportunities of taking and giving help and comfort in the discipline of goodness, in imparting—as the best treasures we possess, and therefore cannot but share—what God Himself has taught us, and experience has confirmed, how to enjoy His presence and His Word. Then heart fires heart, and two disciples find a third to join them whose form is like the Son of God.


MONG the chief helps to *Helps to life.* the enjoyment and expansion of this life first comes knowledge, all knowledge indeed that is solid, innocent, and suitable. For all knowledge being more or less a revelation of God, whether in His attributes or character, just so far as it is apprehended exactly and imparted intelligently, is not only of Him, but for Him. When only secular, as we say, still its use in the spiritual life is evident, since it helps us to equipoise its forces, and to develop them, and to put

them to the best use, thereby protecting us from a sour intellectual narrowness on the one hand, and a too supple emotionalism on the other. In Divine things, it helps us to bear witness to men outside of what God is, and is doing, as living in and speaking through His children. It might also save some among us from a mournful and even bitter depression, through widening for them into something of its glorious vastness, the true horizon of the mind of God, and showing them how He is higher than our thoughts, broader than our creeds, vaster than our plans, and older than our years. Then there is work, on which I would say only a brief word here. God is energy, incessant, unwearied, and beneficent. "My Father worketh hitherto" [John v. 17]; and if we would be in fellowship with His life, we must be at work too. What exercise is to the body, duty is to the spirit, all duty; whether of this life, or the next. Ours is but a single personality; and in whatever He lays upon us to do, God has but one motive, and one method. Duty keeps the conscience awake, goads the sluggish will, shames us out of selfishness, shakes us out of laziness,

best of all compels us to the discipline of self.

Devotion. Once more, God is love ; and towards the fuller possession and fruition of this life, there is but one straight road, devotion. Other things are good and useful ; one is vital. Heart-communion with God. We may well fear that not only the world, but the Church also, is growing too busy to pray. O let us not tumble into that snare, or our spiritual life may not be worth a year's purchase. What we want we ask for ; and what we ask for, we get ; no more. Our Saviour's company may be worth much or little ; this is certain, and it covers the entire area of our life, that it is not won in a day ; nor can even a year's prayers help us to reach the summit of our spiritual Pisgah to survey Canaan at our feet. The spiritual life of which we speak is like some vast and elevated table land, which we do not reach by admiring it from afar, nor win at a bound, nor apprehend by a week's sorrow. Natures differ, and some fruits ripen faster than others, according to soil and sunshine and air. Eternal life also has its laws of expansion in the regen-

erate spirit; and it can grow only through prayer.

MONG the hindrances to *Hindrances to*
life, I will name religious *life.*

egotism first. In personal religion both the objective and subjective elements claim recognition: and a characteristic preponderance of one over the other must, within due limits, be expected and allowed. But we should guard against a want of symmetry and proportion between one feature and another. Of course conscious union with God lies at the root of it; yet if there is too much introspection in it, too frequent a comparing of yesterday's feelings with to-day's, too keen a sensitiveness about tiny faults, or incomplete duties, what will happen? Our own goodness will insensibly take the place of Christ's righteousness as our ground of peace. His precious blood will insensibly lose its power of healing the wounds of sin. Our whole moral nature will become flabby and nerveless. We shall lose our tight grip of those grand central facts and verities, which, like a grand mountain range shutting in a shadeless and dusty plain, are

guides to the pilgrim, and shadows from the storm, and cisterns of living waters to make glad the City of God. Not what I think of God, but what God is in Himself is what touches my salvation. Not what I feel to Him, but what He means for me is the living charter of my hope. To know and believe the love God hath to us, and in the strength of it to go on day by day till we see Him—here is the faith of men.

*Unwise use of
Christian
ordinances.*

But in close connection with this is yet another peril against which I would gently but distinctly warn. Gently, for the peril has a blessed side to it, which some of us may envy; distinctly, for just through its blessedness it may fail to be seen. Ours are eminently devotional times of weekly, even daily communions, frequent spiritual retirements, personal intercourse with religious advisers of the most unreserved character, in a word (I hope not a harsh one), of incessant spiritual luxuries, of which neither our fathers, nor their fathers, ever dreamed, but without which they still contrived both to do and to suffer a good deal for Christ.

Let us judge no man. Let us not presume to thrust our own standard of what is good for us on the consciences of our brethren. We are free. Let us be free.

Still I caution. Let us be jealously on our guard against whatever may tend to put the ordinances of Christ in the place of Christ, as if they were the indispensable ducts of His grace, not to be had without them. Christ and Christ alone is the food of man. "I am the bread of life" [John vi. 35]. It is quite true that He has been pleased to appoint certain ordinances, as channels of Himself, but He is neither bound to them nor confined by them. Sometimes, therefore, He has to vindicate His own honour, by leaving His people in the wilderness, and souls pampered with unwise provision have a sad though needful famine, when their accustomed ministries fail. Some stand the test, but you can count them on the fingers of two hands. Others, who have overstimulated their life by the use of strong cordials, find it a weary journey back to Jacob's well, where the Saviour with His own hands once more dispenses to them the water of life.

Spiritual pride. Of one other hindrance, spiritual pride, I would speak, in its two common forms, of isolation and self-conceit. Isolation, the deliberate undervaluing of the fellowship of Christ's mystical body, either in a chilly unsociableness, or a morbid dread of infection, will tell, and more seriously than we suspect, on the vigour and fruitfulness of the soul. Some sorts of *ἄνταρκεια* are fatal. They mean the loss of that vital spiritual heat which is generated by the public assemblies of the faithful; of that wide and instructive interchange of thought and experience (see p. 99) whereby prejudice is corrected, ignorance remedied, duty suggested, sympathy stirred; of that opportunity of passing on to others what we humbly believe our Master has entrusted to us—not to be kept hid; of that wholesome regimen, of natural but perilous self-love, which whether in the idolatry of our own opinions, or in our sturdy, almost contemptuous dislike of other men's, works like dry rot in the Church. "Yet none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" [Rom. xiv. 7]. It was said of man in Paradise, "It is not good for man to be

alone" [Gen. ii. 18]. If we will be alone, we must take the consequences, which are serious. From spiritual pride in some form or other, who is quite free? All of us are tempted in turn to be intolerant of other men's methods, over-critical of eccentric types of goodness, doubtful about unfamiliar formulas, hasty to look askance at liberty we deny ourselves, merely because it would hurt us, and almost to refuse credence to a spiritual life that seems to live in another zone. Yet let us be humble and full of charity. God fulfils Himself in many ways, and what satisfies Him may be enough for His servants. Nay, were any one to say that certain minds are so constituted as to be incapable of a high type of spiritual vitality, I for one should not care to contradict him. Outward circumstances, difficult functions of life, pressure of secular cares, which we do not create, and yet must not evade, inevitably modify the outward features of personal religion, and make it harder than most of us suspect. No doubt, as the apostle says, "He that is spiritual judgeth all things and He Himself is judged of no man" [1 Cor. ii. 15], nevertheless we must be careful to judge

as those who will themselves be judged. Above everything, never let us suffer our spiritual religion, either in the language that professes it, or in the features that indicate it, to outstrip our moral life. For more swiftly and surely than the deadly dews of the Panama swamps on the European traveller, will the faintest mildew of insincerity poison the springs of the soul. As for society it does not forbid, or altogether dislike spiritual religion in its proper place. It expects and in a way admires it. But it is very uncompromising in its demand for consistency. It *will* have reality, and it is right.

If, with our lofty profession and high aims, and multiplied exercises, there be found small infirmities, hard resentments, insufficient self-control, palpable self-indulgence, a household not ordered for God, and a daily life without the true mint-mark on it, the sermons, in which the preacher bids his hearers be holy, will sound like the turgid phrases of a professional sanctity. The Christian who bids his neighbour carry his cross, while shirking his own, has no quarter from the world.

TWO questions shall end this chapter. One you shall put *Two questions.*

to me, Christian reader: the other I will put to you. If God so freely gives this eternal life to men, with a holy purpose for them that they should accept it, why is it that so few enjoy its blessedness, or make the gift actually their own? This is a question, another side of which will demand consideration further on, but I will glance at it now. Our Lord says, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life" [John v. 40], and again, "How can ye believe which seek honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only" [John v. 44], while St. Paul observes, "If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" [2 Cor. iv. 3, 4]. Men have to choose between two lives, and two worlds and two masters. Some, like Balaam, temporise, and lose both, certainly miss eternal life. Others fail in seeing that the very act of accepting, or if you like to call it so, be-

lieving, implies a critical effort of will, a supreme choice, a victory, which in every real soul, means a pitched battle, an exertion of the spiritual being, which a lazy or undecided soul puts off. As the Lord Himself said to the Jews who inquired of Him, "This is the *work* of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" [John vi. 29]. They who are lovers of pleasure more than of God, will ever lack seriousness of purpose, moral and intellectual, to make them close with Christ. Others fail through not turning knowledge into practice, or translating emotion into conduct; others are fickle, capricious, and shallow, "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" [2 Tim. iii. 7]. Then how many of us refuse the task of bravely encountering intellectual difficulties, and disentangling truth from error! But mental laziness has its penalties as well as bodily; and if men will not take trouble about the truth, doubts will work into them like rankling thorns, and through a feeble vacillation in making up their mind, when the hour of their departure comes, instead of having their feet on a rock they are on the quicksands.

Among Christians in whom this life beats with thin and intermittent pulses, what loss accrues to them, both of joy and power, through doubting God's sufficiency, or slighting His love. Indeed, have any of us any notion of what this eternal life might mean for us, if we gave it full play, and suffered it dominion over our hearts? The joy God has for those who suffer for Him, and the peace for those who trust Him, and the light for those who consult Him, and the fellowship for those who walk with Him, and the holiness for those who love Him, and the happiness for those who shall serve Him, who shall say? "How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures" [Psalm xxxvi. 7, 8],

Now for my question, which I pray you not to shirk, but honestly to answer as in the presence of God. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Ask this on your knees. It is given you, do you recognize it? It is given you, do you care about it?

It is given you, do you mean to receive it? It is given you, do you mean to have of it as much as you can? Eternal life—God's own life—in its moral beauty, Divine perfections, illimitable future, unspeakable gladness; love and hope, truth and righteousness, power that heals, and will that saves. Eternal life—so far as creature can share it, and grace bestow it, in its length, and breadth, and depth, and height, passing knowledge, as the love that gives it does. This is all for you, yours this day, laid at your feet and pressed on your heart by One who, to prove His sincerity, died to procure it for you, lives to persuade and enable you to make it quite your own. If only you will take it, and let it grow within you, according to its own hidden law, and proportion, you shall presently discover, even before you die, what Heaven means. For you will know what God is, through what He gives; and Heaven is the fruition of God. Neglect it, put it aside, let it slip by for a more convenient season; and your Eternity may be one sad remorse for what was once yours, but which, with a carelessness it will be then impossible to understand, you let fall from your sluggish hand.

To be in Christ is the secret of our life ; to be for Christ the meaning of our activity ; to be with Christ is the hope of our glory ; to be all this together the invincible link of our blessed concord. In a little while this eternal life will be manifested ; and sooner than we think of, the curtain will lift, and we shall go in to see the King. Then, but not till then, will our robes of whiteness have no soil on them ; then, assuredly, we shall be like Him, and what now is a hidden life, will shine with the brightness of the sun.

II.

GRACE.

"ASK WHAT I SHALL GIVE THEE."

*"Si tu veux croire en Dieu, vis de telle maniere que
tu ais toujours besoin que Dieu existe."*



KING'S word to a king. Also, a master's to a servant, and a parent's to a child. Of course, it might have been the other way, and sometimes is, reasonably and suitably. Not a few hearts reading these words, and penetrated to the core with a sense of God's faithfulness and goodness to them, wonder what they can give Him that He would care for; love Him so gratefully and trustfully, that they know, did He take them at their word, and ask of them their most cherished treasure, He would make the act of surrendering it a great reward. But it is not so here. It is God who asks and of.

fers : man who thinks and replies. Because He loves us, He offers to help us. In proportion as we believe His love and value it, shall we be at pains to open our hearts to His grace.

“ Bubbles we buy with a whole soul’s tasking,
’Tis Heaven alone that is given away.
’Tis only God may be had for the asking,
No price is set on the lavish summer :
June may be had by the poorest comer.”

—LOWELL.

For what He was to Solomon, He is to us ; and what He said to Solomon, He says to us. Do we care? Some care so little for God, and have Him so little in their thoughts, that He is felt and recognized in the plan of their daily life less than the winter’s sun at the Pole. Many who think they care, still do not see the use of waiting on Him, simply because they never learn it through doing it. Faith, like most things, comes by believing ; just as love by loving, and power by acting. To be possessed by a holy consciousness of God will not come to us merely through a fervent wish to be near Him. Though wishing helps, the

felt-nearness of God is slowly wrought in us by the effort of years.

And first, let us observe in the application of this sentence to our own circumstances, that since God first uttered them, His supreme gift has been bestowed on the world in the Person of His Son, pledge and measure of the rest. It should, therefore, be pondered in connection with that eternal life, which resides in Him for mankind; and can only be interpreted and used in the full acceptance of it. What He most and first desires for us is, that we should take this eternal life and live in the power and beauty of it, and thereby to learn what to ask for as most suitable for it and consistent with it; thereby also be able to receive out of His fulness into capacities widening by use. Yet, so patient is He and bountiful, that, though we do not all at once receive His best gifts, He will not on that account refuse us His lesser ones. He wants to be known as a Giver always of good things; and, when Christ taught His disciples, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" [Acts xx. 35], His own blessed nature taught it Him.

There are some things we ought to ask of

God; some we may; some we can if we please, but we had better not. About some let us be absolutely silent. If they are to come, they will come; but let us have no share in their coming.

And here, on the very threshold of the subject, and in the logic of all solid thinking about it, comes in the critical question, What is the value of Prayer? To those, indeed, who read this book, the preliminary inquiry is hardly likely to be needful. Is there a God to hear it? That we assume. But this admitted, there are still vital points to be settled about it, if we would neither mock Him through unreality, nor rob ourselves through unbelief. Therefore, using the word in its limited meaning of petition, whether for ourselves or for others, let us frankly consider three distinct propositions (not new, nor only of Christian times) which *together* go a long way towards reducing prayer to an absurdity, nay, *supposing them to be true*, even a dishonesty. Then, meeting them with an answer which, to those who accept Revelation and worship a living God, shall give light and strength, we shall have a Gospel indeed.

God *cannot* answer prayer; for this would mean the capricious disturbance of a complicated and permanent system, which goes on from age to age without change or check, and on the unchangeableness of which human society depends.

God *does not* answer prayer; and the proof of it is that things go on just as they would if there was no prayer. When the experiment is proposed of testing the value of prayer in a hospital for the sick, the challenge is declined, on the ground that faith being the condition of answers to prayer, the proposed test would virtually destroy it. The believer may be consistent, but Science remains unsatisfied.

God *will not* answer prayer. Why should He? His love will bless us of its own accord, and does not need our pressing it. His wisdom can choose better for us than we can for ourselves, and a proper humility would be content to trust it. Nevertheless, God permits, sanctions, commands prayer, for the peace, and courage, and submission that the very act of praying brings with it to the troubled spirit. We tell Him our burden, and then leave it, absolutely assured that He

will do the best for us. Our ignorance of what is best, while it justifies our approach, condemns our importunity. Only the actual event can indicate the predestined order; but it is much to have the spirit braced for it when it is ripe.

To these three statements there are very simple replies. The Almightyness of God. The teaching of Holy Scripture. The Example of Christ. The Experience of Mankind. "I believe in God the Father ALMIGHTY." He ordains laws, indicates them, observes them; but we have yet to learn that He is either imprisoned in them or limited by them. Does any one ask, "Are we to understand, then, that God will work a miracle for you in answering your prayers? We thought miracles were over." The answer is: Nothing in Scripture tells us that miracles are over. But I want to know what a miracle is; and if what is usually understood by the word *is* really involved in God hearing and answering prayer. There are many laws in the universe, and many of them are continually in a condition of suspension, and even suppression, through the operation of others, which for the time in-

terfere with them. My will in moving my arm to throw a stone into the air for the moment interferes with the law of gravitation.

*"Donellan
Lectures on
Prayer," by
Professor*

Jellet, p. 57.

Yet no one calls that a miracle. May not the occasional and arbitrary interposition of the Divine will, operating within the immense and unknown economy of the universe, produce the same result, without any violent disturbance of the established order either apparent to the senses or injurious to the world? I can faintly conceive an Almighty God, but I cannot conceive a God who is not Almighty. If He is Almighty, and this wonderful universe, with its hundreds of millions of worlds, is the expression of the Thought of His will—for one of us tiny creatures, a sort of dust-atom, to lift up our little voice to Him and say, Thou canst not do this or that, is to some minds a far more ludicrous dilemma than to confess God, and then to make Him abdicate His omnipotence.

"What saith the Scripture?" From first to last, it not only sanctions, but commands prayer. This is beyond dispute. But what comes from it? Either that these sanctions

and commands are the superstitious and primitive expressions of an unscientific and illiterate religion: full of historic interest, but in no sense binding on the disciples of an intellectual Christianity. In very plain language—the Bible deceives us. Or it is literally, deliberately, continually enjoined on us to pray. Prayer is at once our duty and privilege; but only, because it cannot be in vain.

And our Saviour *prayed*. Thereby leaving us an example, which He further impressed and fortified by very distinct and emphatic words. Oh, I think the heart grows hot, with a not unshameful heat, when it ponders His words about prayer, and is invited to interpret them in the light of the dilemma—either He did not know what He was saying; or, knowing it, He said it, because it was a useful deceit! His prayer before the choosing of the twelve—His prayer before the raising of Lazarus—His prayer about the repentance of Peter—His prayer about the passing of the bitter cup: these were as real, and human, and direct prayers, as any lips of man have breathed: and to say that they were but an acted drama is more of a folly than a blas-

phemy. But in His directions to His apostles—did not He bid them ask, and seek, and knock? Did not He tell them that whatsoever they should ask the Father in His name, He would give it? Did not He bid them, as the final agony of their people came on, to pray that their flight might not be in the winter? Did not He promise them that where two of them should agree concerning anything that they should ask, their Father in Heaven would do it for them?

Once more, what is the experience of mankind? That God does hear prayer, and always answers it. Not, indeed, of necessity, or invariably, in our way, or time. Sometimes He does, and we have our own answer. Perhaps more frequently He does not. But if we trust, and wait, and watch, some answer will come, and the best: far better, as we shall in the end see, than that we had asked ourselves. The end is that, with hardly an exception, the entire human race always has prayed; may we not say, always will pray: while over this groaning earth the human soul feels a canopy of Divine Love to be graciously resting, and the heart of a Father to be open to His sorrowing children's cry.

On the features of prayer that make it acceptable to God, I would add these words. They are, more or less, these four:—*Intenseness*. Oh, to be in earnest, really in earnest. Our prayers are apt to be tepid, dull, insipid, feeble languors, that neither give us peace nor God honour. Let our hearts plead, burn, wrestle, and conquer. “I will not let thee go unless thou bless me” [Gen. xxxii. 26]. This vehemence honours God’s *Continuousness*. What we want to cultivate is more of a spirit of prayer, in which, by a kind of habit, the soul, without set phrases, or postures, or even words at all, lives, and thinks, and acts in the immediate presence of God, humbly waiting for His will. *In the name of Christ*, which does not so much mean the formal mention of His name, as the act of approaching the Father in and by Him, our spiritual representative and head; and in that spirit of perfect filial trust in which in the days of His flesh all His supplications were uttered. *Also in that habit of docile obedient faith*, which comes through the cumulative force of daily duty, whereby through sympathy with His purpose we come to ask for what pleases Him, and

therefore for what He is both willing and able to grant.

“More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If knowing God they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains around the feet of God.”


—TENNYSON.

AND surely the first thing *Temporal*
(for the gift of eternal life *blessings.*

has already been supposed) that we may suitably ask of God, in that naturalness and sincerity, which He expects to see in us, as we in each other, is temporal blessing, measured and chosen by Himself. I know it is a homely gift, but we are human; it is earthly, but we are still in this world. When the Saviour taught His disciples to say, “Give us this day our daily bread” [Matt. vi. 11], He plainly and deliberately justified the principles of such a prayer, while He limited it; and by an illustration borrowed from the natural compassionateness of a father, He yet further en-

couraged its use. When we ask God for bread, and in this complicated system of things, bread for many of us means a great deal, we ask Him for what we want, because He has so made us that we cannot do without it; and because He has made Himself responsible for it, by bringing us here, without any act or choice of ours. He will not give us a stone, or He would be worse than one of His own creatures; but it shall be bread: though not bread rained from Heaven, but coming to us through our own exertions, for which the opportunities occur through Him. Surely it is an insincere and mawkish spirituality that conceives prayer to be marred or stained by its temporal elements, if suitable after their kind; and while it wrongs God by its ignorance of His Fatherly justice, it robs man of his rightful access to the Throne of Grace in every time of need. What, however, do I mean by temporal blessings? Not for the world's prizes, nor sudden turns in the wheel of fortune, nor slippery heights of power, nor constant immunity from trouble, nor to be spared the blessed and wholesome necessity of exerting himself, will a good or wise man ever be care-

ful to ask. But for precious health, without which duty is a fatigue, life a struggle, opportunity a disappointment; and for that reasonable and suitable occupation, in which we may exercise our gifts, rear our children, win our bread, and deserve our friends: for a filled home, where children are light and music, and man and wife make life complete by sympathy, and the tender associations of multiplying years: not least that useful lives may be spared, so that the full task be done before the shadows fall, and the evening stillness comes. Our Heavenly Father knoweth, that more or less we have need of these things, and because He knows it, He expects and invites us to ask Him. Yet, while asking, we must cheerfully leave the issues with Him, certain that He will do the very best for us, and that sooner or later we shall see it to be so.

ERHAPS the next thing of *Simple trust in*
importance is the habit of *God.*

a simple, manly, uncomplaining trustfulness, which appreciates God's promises, rests on His character, accepts His providence, and absorbs His love. Let us frankly confess that

things do not always go, even with the best of Christians, as either they or their friends could wish. Their door has sometimes to open to the Angel of Death, mildew spoils their harvest, and disease smites their cattle. Their wealth makes wings and flees away. On sick-beds they toss uneasily, or with hearts dumb and stunned they gaze into an open grave, seeing but little for the tears. Yet these men and women prayed with all their heart to One who bade them pray, heard and loved them in their praying. Though their hearts fainted within them, through hope deferred, still they prayed on, for not to have prayed would have been to lose God; and to lose God is to perish. One other thing let me insert here. Small do you call it? That is why I put it in. For it is small things that, just because of their smallness, distress and overset us. They do not seem to require our strength, and so they make our weakness to be seen. I mean the weight of daily care which in their small details of personal expenditure, and in the careful routine of a household, and in the rearing of children, and in the society of friends, and in the outside

duty, and in private affairs, singly and separately is sufficiently burdensome; but altogether, and on one set of shoulders, is sometimes felt to be more than the strength can bear. Those anxious lives, tempted to be fretful, and hasty, and self-important, and fussed with their incessant activities, may, if rightly interpreted, and manfully grasped, settle down into round and sunny centres of regular, and peaceful, and fruitful activities. "Smooth endless days," as Mrs. Browning calls them, only not "notched here and there with knives," shall be the rule and not the exception; no one shall be neglected, and nothing missed. For where there is prayer, there is peace; and God, who makes every duty possible, knows, helps, and cares. Then, there may be a very weight of calamity. Yet where does the Gospel tell us that the Church is to be spared trouble? Oh, never let us judge of God's love to us, or purpose about us, by the outward features of our life; only by His personal dealing with our spirits. Do not fear circumstances. They cannot hurt us, if we hold fast by God and use them as the voices and ministries of His will. Our good

ness and our greatness do not consist in what we have, but in what we are. If God be for us, it matters not who or what is against us, for all things shall work together for our good. Manifold as may be the changes in front of us, sad the partings, sharp the disappointments, fiery the trials, if only we cling to God, life shall be our schooling for immortality, and death our summons home. Trust Him, trust Him. Trust Him about every one and everything, for all times and all needs; earth and heaven, friends and children, the conquest of sin, the growth of holiness, the cross that chafes, the grace that stirs. To trust God honours and glorifies Him. The true child of a reconciled Father revealed, seen, and adored in Jesus Christ, moment by moment, lives, learns, conquers, and rejoices *through* faith.

Then may we not ask for a *Patience with* bright, calm, manly patience with *worries*. the small vexations, the crass blunders, the petulant resentments, the wilful misrepresentations, the insolent criticisms, and even the savage attacks, which for many of us, perhaps for most of us, are sometimes a trial even of fire. Was it not Antoninus Pius who said

that "it is royal to do good and be abused"? Some men can claim a good deal of this kind of royalty. It is easy for persons outside to say, "Do not care." The friends who are such philosophers about their neighbours' troubles are sometimes the loudest to complain of their own. Still, when these things come, either blistering us (and knat-bites fester on men as well as on dogs), possibly bruising us (and a blow on the face must make it swell, though it be the face of Aristides), let us try for a calm self-control. We will be slow in our explanations to those who might be incapable of understanding them. Let a dignified silence be our meek protection, to go on in our duty our present reply, the first chance of a kindness eagerly seized our happy revenge. He who permits these things knows why He permits them. We who suffer them may be sure that there is a discipline behind. If it is a reproach not to have friends, it may be even a greater not to have enemies. "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets" [Luke vi. 26]. Nay, let us fear not to say that if they come to us for doing our duty,

even though with some imperfection, they are truly honourable. Also let us not be too much afraid of occasional mistakes. The man who in the way of his duty has ceased to be capable of them has probably lost the courage to be useful. There is an ignoble prudence, that earns the reproach of God, and the contempt of men. A good conscience as to motive, the glory of God for our settled purpose, a brave habit of meeting criticisms, however sour or abrupt, because God understands us, if men do not, will keep us quiet and strong. While mistakes sometimes earn for men almost a more severe punishment than crimes, it is only for a moment, and then comes the reaction. When the curtain rises that now shuts out both the divine secrets, and the completed story of our career, our mistakes, as we call them, may at least in some degree be found to have had a larger share in our usefulness, perhaps a larger part in our education for immortality.

Further let us ask (of course only if we feel to need it) for a *Individuality.*
sense of individuality, with the responsibility and sense of independence that will be its

companion and result. "Every man shall bear his own burden" [Gal. vi. 5]. We observe some men who are so sensitive to criticism, so helpless and crushed in the face of public opinion, so gelatinous in the texture of their moral nature, so morbid and vain in their depreciation of their own gifts, that they do not fill their place, nor use their talent, nor leave their mark, nor make their confession. How shall this best be remedied? Only through their distinctly apprehending the grand truths of the Divine Sovereignty and Providence, and by stirring a suitable self-respect in one who is both a son and heir of God. It is nothing to the purpose that in some persons we observe an offensive preponderance of individualism. The world is usually at pains to correct this self-esteem with quite sufficient sharpness; and is also the gainer in the end. Each redeemed and baptised soul should remember that God has sent it into the world with gifts, duties, and opportunities, which He who has ordained them, will help it to cultivate, and expects it to improve. All God's ways are consistent with each other, and complete each other. Every one has been sent into

the world with a work to do, and with the means for doing it. He who does not see his work, probably has not taken the pains to discover it. He who morosely complains of his scanty opportunities might be surprised to hear that his own negligence has made them scantier. We can't see with our eyes shut. There is a humility among some of us, which, called by its proper name, is but a subtle and obstinate pride, that will not fit itself for great duties by accepting and discharging smaller ones first. So occasions slip away, never coming back; and the years of what might have been a noble life, become the tedious vacuities of a listless one, and the poor jelly-fish, despising itself to begin with, becomes more and more torn by contact with everything that encounters it. There is no moral courage to make a fresh start and redeem what is behind.

To all of us the Gospel says in Christ's name, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" [Matt. iv. 19]. Only dare to believe in Him, and that will help you to believe in yourself. Walk with Him, and then you will forget your solitariness. Listen to Him, and

the murmur of the voices outside will have no more power to disturb you than the mutterings of the winter storm across the bar can startle him who, from the safety of his home, looks out on the foam of the dancing waters. Cling to Him, and the sense of what He is to you, and of what you have in Him, will give you the dignity of a king.

Be thyself, says Christ to us, and stand up on thy feet that I may speak to thee, and give thee thy errand. Be thyself what I have made thee, and meant for thee, and do not complain that thou art not some other man. No one else can do thy work, or fill thy place, or declare thy message, or use thy opportunities as well as thou canst, or indeed at all. For no man can do another's work for him. If it is not done by each one for himself, it is not done at all. God is thy Father! Go forth bravely and strongly to witness for Him as His child in thine own way. Christ is in thy heart. Is not that enough, both for thy food and protection, light and gladness?

If our solitariness is an awful truth, it is a great responsibility; and, for the burden shall be the crown. The crown our King Himself shall choose.

“True dignity abides in him alone
Who in the silent hour of inward thought
Can still suspect and still revere himself,
In lowliness of heart.” —LOWELL.

Shall we ask for a filled life, *A filled life.*
opulent in its duties, free in its
recreations, wide in its culture, generous in
its friendships? Do if thou wilt. Who
shall say, “Thou hast sinned”? Yet, God
must choose. Most wise parents, I suppose,
would prefer for a child on the threshold of
responsible life a real accomplishment to a
cheque even of four figures. Art and music,
the wealth of literature, and the joy of song
are both friends and companions, which
neither waste nor corrupt, neither vex nor
weary. All things, no doubt, have their pro-
portions of use and goodness; and each ac-
cording to his circumstances must decide for
himself what his recreation shall be. To cheer
and interest others is an incidental advantage
of personal accomplishment. If knowledge
is the secret of eloquence, it is the charm of
talk; and to converse well is a talent that
must be earned through being cultivated.
The more that the Christian knows, the bet-

ter it will be for his influence and usefulness, if he is careful to use it wisely. If only we remember that edification in the widest sense of the word is what we owe each other; and that we were sent into the world not only to enjoy ourselves, but to do our best to make those under our influence good and wise, and strong and happy, then Raphael and Milton, Faraday and Handel, shall be our companions, though also our leaders; and by aiming throughout all our life to serve God, through helping our brethren, conscience will be satisfied, and who shall make us afraid about our innocent joy?

HERE I may suitably inter- *About our*
pose a Gospel for parents; *children.*

and no words I can find express with adequateness the blessed claim we have on the promises of God for the training and salvation of our children. The gospels tell us that Jesus took the children into His arms and blessed them—blessed them, I suppose, because He loved them—and oh, what a comfort for us who have children ourselves! What a solemn trust, what an ever-deepening anxiety, yet

what a tender and exquisite joy! A trust, of which we shall one day have to give solemn account to God; an anxiety, which sometimes (though we are ashamed of it afterwards) tempts us to wish that we had never had any; a joy, which all through the day, with its feverish troubles and duties, exhilarates the heart with the hope of the welcome at home. God, who is a Father, has given them to us, and expects us to train them for Him. He loves them much more than we can do, has deeper at His heart their salvation and happiness. Will He deny His grace, or refuse His protection, or soon be weary of waiting, or be very slow to forgive? To some of us the need of God in this matter is unspeakable. There may be only one parent left to do the work of two. The mother left alone, sighs as she feels her inability to be a father to the bright eager boys, just on the eve of their plunge into life. The father, overweighted it may be with onerous duties, incapable just because of his manhood of being a mother to his daughters, sometimes feels paralyzed by the sense of his helplessness about them; silent about his own loss, he is tempted to mourn for his children's.

“ Women know
 The way to rear up children, (to be just)
 They know a simple, merry, tender knack
 Of
 Stringing pretty words that make no sense
 And kissing full sense into empty words,
 Which things are corals to cut life upon,
 Although such trifles ; children learn by such,
 Love’s holy earnest in a pretty play
 And yet not over-early solemnized.

.
 Such good do mothers. Fathers love as well
 —Mine did, I know—but still with heavier brains,
 And wills more consciously responsible,
 And not as wisely, since less foolishly ;
 So mothers have God’s license to be missed.”

—E. B. BROWNING.

“Ask what shall I give thee,” says God to the bewildered heart ; and this voice is a gospel indeed. Be it the finding of a nurse, or the selection of a governess, or the choosing of a school, or the settling on a profession, whatever comes close to us has living interest for Him. Oh, to be children, ourselves with God, in the simplicity of a dutiful faith ! He knows, understands, observes, cares, pities, watches, and, in the end, provides. We have our duty, He His. Our duty is to trust Him, and to train them. His duty is to bless them

and to help us. If we are not wanting on our side, He never will be on His; and our dear, happy refuge is in intercession. To tell Him everything about their needs, and our own; then to leave them, and not to look too much forward. These children, whom some of us love so passionately, and enjoy so delightfully, and watch so anxiously—we long to make them happy, for it seems their right, though with a happiness regulated by self-restraint, both on their side and our own. We long also to see them good, and are humbled to the quick of the heart when we see our own faults peeping out of them; and must firmly correct them for the imperfections they have inherited. Yet they are His as well as ours; in a sense, more His than ours; twice His, by creation and grace. Shall not we constantly plead with Him His covenant in baptism? May we not say to Him, “Hast not Thou adopted them, to keep them Thine, not easily to cast them off”? Can we conceive any prayers, amid the great tumult of human needs and wishes and tears and conflicts, that ever go up from this travailing earth to the heart of God, more congenial to His fatherly

nature, more likely to be victorious with His compassionate heart, more absolutely in sympathy with His redeeming purpose, more honourable to the passion of His Son Christ, than a parent's prayers for His precious, though sinful, children, that they may be kept safe in their voyage over the waves of this troublesome world, and be at home with Christ for ever!

For three things more let us ask Him. They are the best, and so I have kept them to the last. But on the measure, both of our appreciating and of our asking them, depends all our Christian life. They are cognate to this offer of Solomon, and are the essence of the gospel.

GET your entire spiritual being simply impregnated with the idea of *God's fatherliness*. *God a Father.* This is the one unfailing key to all the problems of life—its denials and its bountifulness, its sunshine and its storm, its voices and its silence. Of course, He is Moral Ruler also—and a very strong one. We have found out this already, most of us. If we forget it, we

shall be perhaps sternly reminded that love is not a weak connivance at sin. But His government is contained in, and is administered by, His Fatherliness. Not to rule, guide, correct, would be not to love. Of His Fatherliness, the one result and object is to conform us to the image of His Son. Father though He be, He does not undertake to explain everything to us. When we grieve Him, we must not wonder that His face is turned away. Sometimes He cannot spare us anguish, sometimes He must keep us in weary suspense. Often, indeed, it may have occurred to some of us, that among the untold blessings of children, not quite the least is that we are helped to understand God's dealings with us so much more clearly, through viewing them in the light of an earthly parent's conduct to his child. Our pity, and tenderness, and patience, and yet inexhaustible love, with sometimes real displeasure and a heart sore and torn, may help us to see how our Heavenly Father feels towards ourselves. For human nature is on the lines of the Divine. Were it not, how could we understand it—how be capable of partaking of it? To

trust and wait; never to fear asking Him, if only we ask dutifully; never to think that we can disturb Him with all our cares and troubles, if only we leave them behind when we rise from our knees; to tell Him first and also last about everything that concerns us; to feel it impossible that He can ever be unjust, or unkind, or impatient, or weary. Even when He chastens us, still to love Him through all the anguish; even when He does not speak to us, to be assured that presently the answer will come, and the right one. This is what we like our children to be and to feel with us; let this be our mind towards God. Then because He is our Father, and we call Him so, and He delights in our doing it, let us continually, and fervently, and as the rule of our daily life, ask for His Holy Spirit. This is the petition about which we may always be sure that He heareth us; this is the gift which gives to all temporal blessings their safety and blessing, to all spiritual graces their perfection and concord. It is the promise of the Father, not only for His Church as a body, but for the individual members of it; nay, it is the one end for which the Risen

Lord went back to plead. For our tasks and our pleasures, for our sorrows and our joys, for home and for society, for discipline and for culture; for training our children, enjoying our friends, ruling our households, winning and persuading the lost—this is our need and His promise. Oh, if any words of mine could but induce those who read this book to live their daily lives as taught and used and helped and guided by God the Holy Ghost, it would be a changed world both for them and for others. Perhaps we have all of us yet to fathom the meaning of the sentence in the Creed, “I believe in the Holy Ghost.” I am sure that we have no notion of what God could make us to be, and give us to have, and call us to do, and help us to learn, and enable us to suffer, and permit us to enjoy, if we would but try to understand our Lord’s own promise. “If ye therefore being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him” [Luke xi. 13]. Whatever hesitation there may be about our other prayers, there need be none with this.

ONCE more let us ask that *Love to Christ.*
 we may love Christ, and serve Him, and confess Him, and resemble Him, and be in some faint, yet real, degree representative of Him to men. To have as the one hallowing thought of our mind, "Christ calls me His friend, how shall I keep and enjoy and deepen that friendship; Christ is my Master, how shall I best serve and please Him here below?" To have as the one supreme consolation in our disappointment, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" [Rom viii. 35]. This is peace. As the one final hope of our being, when activities diminish, and vigour ebbs, and skies darken, and friends die, to say, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth whom I desire beside Thee" [Ps. lxxiii. 25] can we say it? It is the highest devotion. Of course, there is a sense in which we must *deserve* this conscious possession of Christ, with all the calmness and power that go with it, though the fact of our deserving it is itself a miracle of grace. But that we may go on into the dark future with a sense of possessing this friendship, and with the faculty of enjoy-

ing it, and with the power of returning it, is a prayer we should constantly put up to Him, who, not content with loving, asks to be loved, and often has long to wait for an answer.

For as we love Him, we shall grow like Him. "Be Christ to us" is sometimes the bitter, but not quite unreasonable demand of the world on the Church, and we can be Christ to men only in two ways—by character and truth. Character implies self-knowledge and victory over discovered faults, and then the irresistible and incessant power which a consistent life ever wins over mankind. I know that self-knowledge is rare, and feeble natures shrink from it, and as we grow older, instead of its augmenting, too often it diminishes through a fatal self-love, which, like a quilt of eider-down, keeps off the bracing air of criticism, and lulls us into dreams of our own goodness, from which some day we may be only too rudely aroused.

But, with a dread of sin we must join a love of truth—that truth which Jesus Himself claims to be—the truth in love, and not with hard blows and rough words. None are so

capable of usefulness as those who know the truth; none so ready for it as those who feel responsible for a great inheritance; none so potent with it as those who can answer their brethren with salt and kindness; none so fruitful out of it as those who can love and wait, think and pray.

*Seasons of
special grace.*

No doubt there are special moments and crises of the soul, when God comes near and whispers His very Presence into the heart. There are special as well as ordinary gifts of grace, and it is possible to miss both. They may be to anticipate some great trial that is at hand, or to prepare us for a sudden advancement, or to lift us out of the fog of a blinding perplexity, or to assure us of His presence before something takes us into the strife of tongues. God has His times for visiting the souls He loves, and it is our wisdom to seize them, and to take what they offer. Surely it is significant, that it was when Solomon had been offering sacrifice to God, that God came to him with this offer, "Ask what I shall give thee." God met His child's gift by giving him another. The more we get, the more we become able to get. To

be filled is one thing, to have much to be filled is another. A child's drinking-cup and the depths of the Atlantic may both brim over. But we know which holds most, and even God cannot force on us more than we can receive.

There is no exhausting the grace of God. What most grieves Him is to doubt Him. He is able to give us all, "much more than these." What we really need to learn is, how much God has for us ; and to do is to get it ; and to conquer is our strange dumbness in the presence of the King. There are many lessons we cannot learn. Life is not long enough here. Also about many things it does not so much matter whether we learn them or not. But the Gospel has its length, and breadth, and depth, and height, which we are to consider, if we cannot fathom them ; and the one prayer we ought all of us in the time to come to learn to say more humbly, more sincerely, more gratefully, more trustfully than ever, is, "Lord, show us the Father"

III.

FORGIVENESS.

"CLEAN EVERY WHIT."

"The Gospel declares a present love of God to the sinner, which would not only have him back again, but which has given him all things needful to enable him to return."



YOU remember what had *Incident in* happened. Christ and *John xiii.* the Apostles had come into Jerusalem to keep the Paschal Feast. Through a chance forgetfulness—caused, it seems, by an unworthy dispute about precedence—the service due to the Lord of washing His feet, before the meal commenced, had been omitted. Partly, it may be, to remind them of this, though gently—also, we may be sure, to teach them the double lesson, they would never afterwards forget, of the tender love

He felt to them, and which He desired them to show to each other—He took a towel, and girded Himself. Then, going down on His knees before them, He washed their feet one by one—Peter's, who warmly remonstrated; John's, who must have deeply pondered; Judas's, who dared not resist, but whose cold hate, as we see from his question afterwards, grew into a sort of bitter insolence. What did it all mean? Two things, the statement and interpretation of which are here before us. The preceptive value of it, as contained in the words, "I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you" [John xiii. 15], there will be time enough to consider presently. The doctrinal meaning of it, so tersely wrapped up in the three words before us, so vitally and historically connected with the Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord, I will examine now. It is the Gospel of the Forgiveness of Sins.

There are two distinct aspects *The aspects of*
of thought current in our time *modern thought.*
in reference to this subject. Modern unbelief boldly and emphatically maintains that forgiveness of sins is at once impossible with

God, and destructive for man. Impossible for God ! since, if He is consistent with Himself in all His operations and dealings with us, the same God (as Bishop Butler presses in his great argument) in the Kingdom of Grace that He is in the World of Nature, He will act in the one as He acts in the other, and be careful not to contradict Himself. But it is certain that He never permits or forgives the slightest violation of physical order. Every breach of Nature's laws has its inevitable recompense and reward. Equally certain, then, must it be that He never can, never ought to condone any offence against the moral. As for man, it is positively injurious to him, because essentially subversive of all authority without, and of all moral sense within, him, to suffer him to suppose that if he sins, he can be treated in any other way than that of personally suffering all the consequences. Nay, at all times, this notion of a free and gratuitous pardon is alleged to have been the fruitful source of moral disorder, in encouraging men to suppose that they can sin with impunity ; and with equal eagerness, is repudiated the notion, that even the deepest and

truest repentance can be any just claim with God that the law should not take its course.

At quite the other extremity of religious speculation, we occasionally find a perilous looseness of statement as to the facility of pardon, and, consequently, by no remote inference, of the comparative unimportance of sin. The Divine readiness to forgive may, it is obvious, be pressed in such serious disproportion to other equally true and solemn verities about the guilt of sin, and the true meaning of sincere repentance, that it may come even to represent God as winking at it, through the freeness and gloriousness of the remedy that manifests His redeeming love to sinners. The parable of the Prodigal Son is almost the most precious exposition, in all the Bible, of the heart of the Father towards mankind. But it is possible so to depict the welcome of the penitent, and the eager readiness of his father to forgive and forget his guilt, as to tempt the feeling that no slight injustice was done to the elder brother, who was ever with him sharing his home and his love.

“ The world will not believe a man repents :
And this wise world of ours is mainly right.

Full seldom doth a man repent, or use
Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch
Of blood and custom wholly out of him,
And make all clean, and plant himself afresh."


—TENNYSON.

The figure.

First let us examine the figure by means of which the Lord conveys the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins; and then proceed to consider what it means, and what it does not.

The three words in our English version are represented by only two in the original, both of them adjectives. The exact rendering is, "clean, all of him." The illustration is, beyond doubt, borrowed from the use of the bath. One who has just bathed, and goes straight home, will not, on returning there, need to be bathed again, for his body just cleansed has not yet had time to contract fresh soils. With one exception: The feet, left partially unprotected by the open sandals, from dust or mire on the walk home, may need a fresh cleansing. But this is all. The rest of the body is clean. Thus, by a rapid and easy transition from the material and visible into the spiritual and invisible world,

Christ used the figure of the cleansing of the body in the water of the bath, for an illustration of the cleansing of the soul through Divine Grace; a cleansing which, whatever its method, and its conditions, and its instruments, has at least two essential features stamped on it by Christ—it is supernatural, and the very work of God Himself. It is also complete.

O you ask what it is we mean, when we speak of spiritual defilement? and in what intelligible sense can such defilement be said to be washed from the spirit of man? For it is plain that the spiritual essence we so dimly apprehend and imperfectly describe as the word “soul,” cannot be reached or affected by material processes in the application of sensible things. That spirit can be soiled at all, is but the application to one sort of existence of a fact or condition belonging to another, and widely differing from it. Consequently it is essential that we should penetrate through the shell of the figure to the spiritual truth beneath.

*Figure
explained.*

Holy Scripture uses three distinct figures

as illustrations of that Divine process on the soul, which the Apostles' Creed defines as "the forgiveness of sins," and which our Lord describes as being "clean every whit." They are the Water, the Blood, and the Word. WATER, as we read in the prophet Ezekiel, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean. From all your filthiness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you" [Ezekiel xxxvi. 25]. Again, in the Acts of the Apostles, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" [Acts xxii. 16]. BLOOD, of the use of which one instance may suffice. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb" [Rev. vii. 14]. The WORD: in our Lord's own use of it in this same thirteenth chapter, "Now ye are clean through the Word, which I have spoken unto you" [John xv. 3]. One instance more, which gives a remarkable combination of two of these figures with reference to the Church, "That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word" [Eph. v. 26].

Now, of what truths are these figures the symbols? Water is the symbol of the super-

natural operation of God the Holy Ghost in the regeneration and sanctification of the soul, whereby are conveyed and applied the forces of Divine Grace to the soul of man. "According to His mercy He hath saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost" [Titus iii. 5]. This is St. Paul's figure. Blood is the symbol of that atoning sacrifice, whereby is declared unto us, at once, man's sin, with its consequent ruin and helplessness, and that unspeakable, unfathomable mystery of grace, wherein God's holiness and pity came together into one redeeming concord, and righteousness and peace kissed each other on the Cross. "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins" [Eph. i. 7]. Again St. Paul. Word symbolises the method of communicating this to man's understanding. For hereby through the conveying of the facts and truths, and ideas, and promises of the Gospel to the heart and conscience through the reason, in words written or spoken, his spirit is seized, touched, stirred, broken, and healed. "Preaching peace by Jesus Christ" [Acts x. 36]. this is St. Peter's account; in a word, the Blood is the

exhibition and operation of a Divine redemption; the Word is the vehicle of that wondrous Gospel to the intelligence of mankind; the Water is the visible sign and instrument by which that message is applied and assured. The end of it is, that Christ having died and risen again, and the Spirit having been given as the Father's promise to men, accompanying and vitalising the Gospel of a full and free and present salvation to them that are afar off, and also to them that are nigh, they who perceive their own necessity, and know and believe God's great love to them, cast themselves at the feet of Christ the Redeemer, and are made "clean every whit."

*It means full
and present
pardon.* Now let us consider what this means, for our consolation and encouragement. It means four infinitely blessed and life-giving truths for the Church of God. First, the full, free, present, unreserved forgiveness of sins, to every penitent and believing soul approaching God by Christ, and, presenting in an act of faith, His merits and sacrifice as the one ground of propitiation and mercy, whereby His holy grief and displeasure are put away, and the plagues

and penalties of it remitted, and the veil that shut out His face taken away and constant access opened into His presence. Loved before, or why should it have been redeemed, now the soul is doubly loved; and in the grand hyperbole of the Psalmist, "As far as the East is from the West, so far shall He remove our transgressions from us" [Ps. cxiii. 26].

And with pardon goes Righteousness. You cannot really *The gift of righteousness.* separate one from the other, either in the purpose of God's mercy or in the method of it. So much so, that when St. Paul writes about it to the Romans, he not only includes the one in the other, but practically identifies them as two halves of one whole. "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, 'Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin'" [Rom. iv. 6, 8]. which means, only diversely expressed, that to whom He does not impute sin, forgiving him, He does impute righteousness, justifying him. One act does both, and one love bestows

both. To be forgiven is the same thing as to be accounted righteous before God. For, clearly, it is either both or neither. It is either the prodigal crouching in the outside darkness, or the accepted child standing before the Father in Christ, his representative and head.

*Sufficient
grace.*

But with pardon for sin, and the divine righteousness going with it, is the pledge of continuous grace, assured protection, and final victory. God is ever consistent in His purpose, which is to overcome sin in us; and righteous in His character, which never claims anything that we are not reasonably able to perform. Christ died for our sins that we might die unto it. Therefore, we are told to reckon ourselves "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" [Rom. vi. 11]. Be sure that whatever we need for holiness and victory, God has for us—in Christ: only we are to ask for it. "The river of God is full of water"; we also know that "the water is the gift of God" [John iv. 10].

Usefulness.

Once more, and briefly (for this is a thought which deserves and

will receive frequent, though terse, repetition), pardon, acceptance, victory, imply and include one thing more: our usefulness. Observe this in the case of St. Peter. Even before he denied his Lord, it was laid on him by anticipation. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" [Luke xxii. 32]. This is just what happened. After the Resurrection, as they walked together by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus asked him, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Feed my lambs; feed my sheep" [John xxi. 15, 16]. He did feed them. Does any reader of this book wish to know if he is forgiven? It is neither a foolish wish nor a presumptuous one. Let him ask himself, not only if God is using him, but also if he is willing to be used. The Master of the house is not so rich in faithful witnesses that He can afford to dispense with one of them. If the joy of the divine forgiveness has really touched the quick of our heart, it will be quite impossible for us to be idle.

NOW observe, and with *Errors to be avoided.* grave attention, what forgiveness does not mean. It does not mean, let me be bold and ask, could it be good for

us that it should, that the moral and physical consequences of sin, so far as this life is concerned, can ever be remitted or repealed. As much in the moral government of God as in the majestic order of nature, there is an inexorable reign of law. It is as true for a saint as for a reprobate, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" [Gal. vi. 7]. While it is true that the drunkard may be utterly delivered out of his cups, and the demon of strong drink cast out of him, yet the tissues, both of body and mind, until he drops into his grave, must be marked by the excesses of the past. Fifty years of abstinence in front can only prevent future mischief; they cannot drain out of his system one drop of what has been already swallowed. That the past is irrevocable is a law for all men in everything and everywhere. We must consent meekly to bow to this absolute rule of righteousness. We must recognize and accept in it the merciful severity which, to prevent sin, deliberately makes its results evident and abiding, which will never try to avert evil and assist goodness by making evil as sweet as goodness.

Nor again, are we to expect that, because sin has been forgiven and put away, it will never tempt us again. In our regeneration it may have received a deadly wound, but being hard to kill it still lives on, and unless we take care, may soon lift up its head and be too much for us again. Its forms, no doubt, will be varied and modified by our years; for self-love has a thousand developments. The old man's temptations are not the boy's. A man in middle life is tempted by trials of his own. But it is the same mischief under a new dress. Till we die, "the motions of sins in our members" will ever be tempting us to be false to Christ; nay, occasionally it almost seems that those who most wish to be like Christ, are those who are most with Him in the severity of His temptations; and that the disciples, whom He most dearly loves, honourably uses, continuously sanctifies, are those whom the tempter is permitted (as with Job of old) to harass with the most grievous and poignant temptations. Sometimes, as the Psalmist crying up to God from the revealed depths of a heart which makes them loathe themselves, they call aloud to God, "Hath God forgotten to be gra-

cious; hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" [Ps. lxvii. 9].

It does not again follow that sin forgiven is sin forgotten, either by God, or by man, or by ourselves. You may think it inexact to quote Joseph's brethren as an instance of this, when in the presence of the august ruler they said, one to another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother" [Gen. xlii. 21]. Certainly, that pathetic history gives us no reason to suppose that they ever truly repented of it till the sin was brought home to their door. But we may be quite sure that David's sin about Uriah was never forgotten, either by his enemies or by himself, until the rest of the grave had soothed him into forgetfulness. St. Peter never forgot that he had denied his Lord. Had he forgotten it, there would have been many ready to give the seton of memory a pull. This, too, bitter and humbling as it may be, is also wholesome and sobering, operating by the force of law through the action of memory, and the power of mental association, sometimes, too, the cruelty of unrelenting hearts. Yet it is no proof whatever that we are neither forgiven nor loved. What it

does show is, that there must be some fresh lesson for us to learn of humility or watchfulness; more tenderness to acquire in dealing with the infirmities of tempted brethren; more sympathy to manifest in helping them to bear their burdens up the steep Hill, Difficulty, to the house where Evangelist discourses on the gospel of grace. Once more, and oh! that this awful truth could be written as with the point of a diamond in our hearts, it never can be quite the same thing—no, not even in eternity—to have sinned, as not to have sinned; however profound the repentance, complete the conversion, devoted the service, edifying the life. A blameless past must always be better than a stained one. It is blessed to repent and to be forgiven; but blessed, oh! far blessed, is it never to have left our Father's house at all, and to have kept ourselves in a pure youth and an upright manhood. *Every one and everything is worse for sin.* For sin goes on scattering its contagions and harvesting its results long after it has been confessed, forsaken, and forgiven—nay, long after he who has sinned has joined the white-robed throng. To some this

thought of the terrible, and, in a sense, unending vitality of sin would be almost intolerable, if they could not somehow leave it with Him who, in forgiving, knows what He has forgiven, has other ways, we trust, of preventing, and healing, and finally overcoming evil, than He has been pleased to reveal.

What I would press now is, that not for one moment is the thought to be tolerated, that because Christ has died for us, and God is reconciling us to Himself in Him, therefore a little sin, more or less, is of small consequence. If only for five minutes we could contemplate the anguish of a lost soul over unforgiven sin, could feel the gloom of the outer darkness settling down on an unhappy spirit banished from the King's marriage-feast, we should better understand how to loathe and resist it now.

Faith purifies. In conclusion of this part of the subject, let me remark on St. Peter's words to the Church at Jerusalem about the power of faith to purify the heart of man. This faith (about which a subject like the Gospel requires continual exposition) applies, as necessity calls for it, the precious

blood of Christ with all it means, and bestows, to the continual frailties of the believer's conscience, resting on the Word of God, claiming His grace, going in and out of His presence, uttering a true Amen to the claims of His righteousness.

Yet faith does not mean presumption. Rather it implies soberness and vigilance, a burning desire to avoid sin, a quick readiness to acknowledge it, when we have tumbled into its snare; a solemn purpose to renounce it for the future.

Also, to borrow the figure before us, really in a certain sense it is unavoidable, that in his daily activities, and inevitable mingling with the world, the hands and feet of the cleansed and accepted Christian must contract some defilements, which need neither spoil his consistency nor blunt his conscience. Yet the more carefully we pick our steps through the miry places of the world, the better it will be for us. Soils once contracted easily work into the character unless confessed and disowned. The Church needs all the goodness she can get, to help her faithfully to witness to the world.

.

I SAID there was a preceptive value in this incident. *Preceptive value of the incident.*

When Christ rose up from washing the disciples' feet, He asked, "Know ye what I have done unto you? If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet" [John xiii. 12, 14]. Let us clearly see that the Gospel does not tell us merely what we are to have, but what we are to be. It is not simply a way of escape from pains and penalties, it explains our spiritual inheritance in what God desires us to be, through our likeness to Him.

What does it mean to wash one another's feet, chiefly, if not exclusively, in that region of thought and conduct, which is germane to the subject before us, "the forgiveness of sins"? This is as important in its bearing on the corporate life of the Church, as on the personal edification of its individual members. It has been well observed that "the effect of *Fragments of truth.* Christianity is to introduce new relationships among men." Christians, as Christians, have a claim on our regard, and this new relationship has corresponding duties. In the almost total absence of any

thing like Church discipline, normally administered and dutifully accepted, the mutual help and comfort that Christians can give each other in their private religious life, grows into exceptional importance. In nothing, as I have before observed about this, is the gulf so apparent between the primitive (p. 25) times and our own, as in the almost Arctic unsociableness of our modern religious life. It is correlated by the comparative indifference we feel to the spiritual edification of our brethren, through our being devoid of all sense of responsibility about it. What is the love which I owe to my neighbour, simply as a Christian to a Christian, distinct from, though often it will be in addition to, the love of affinity and friendship: it may be in spite of personal unattractiveness, and a total lack of intellectual or social sympathy—the love, in fact, which I owe to him, because he is dear to Christ, and Christ is real to me. Here, assuredly, was the original, and with many now, the hardly appreciated evidence of the truth of Christianity, to which our Lord appealed, “Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one

to another" [John xiii. 35]; also in his general Epistle St. John writes, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" [1 John iii. 14]. I suppose that the Lord Jesus washing His disciples' feet could hardly have been a greater shock to St. Peter than Philemon mixing in kindly intercourse with Onesimus must have been to the Pagans at Colosse, or a Hebrew of the Hebrews to his own compatriots, eating, drinking, and conversing with the Gentile scum of Rome. Gentle reproof of sin is one way. Not to permit sin in our brother, either by conniving at it, or excusing it, or repeatedly suffering it to pass unnoticed. Who does not instantly recognize the immense need of tact, and delicacy, and kindness here? How those who are ready to observe their brethren's faults, should be quick to detect, and generous to confess, their own. How those who find it easy to set their brethren right are usually those whose spiritual self-love tempts them to cultivate their neighbour's vineyard rather than their own. How the tenderest and humblest souls, recollecting their Lord's warning, "Judge not that ye be not judged" [Matt vii. 1]

are prone to feel it a serious uncharitableness even to observe sin in a brother, a grave presumption to notice it. Yet, surely the greatest service we can do our brother is to help him into goodness; and it is better to risk the resentment of a friend, who will thank us for it afterwards, than to be untrue to Christ. There are opportunities of speaking, and delicacies of expression, and charities of silence, and preparations of prayer, which will occur to us all, and which reflection and practice will make perfect. Faithfulness need not be sharpness. Reproof, studied and prayed about, may be as gentle as the falling dew. This is certain, that again and again we find ourselves rewarded for having, in this way, inflicted worse pain on ourselves than on our brother, by his gratitude afterwards. To prevent sin is ever better than to deliver out of it, a result which a word of caution will often effect, and an act of sacrifice perhaps clinch for ever. It is a blessed feature of this present time, which, indeed, has not so many elements of hopefulness about it, that we can afford to forget one of them, that a strenuous and successful effort is being made in an organized and systematic

way to remedy and even to prevent intemperance. The force of example is far more telling than we have any notion of, in the mere fact of total abstinence from intoxicating beverages, without apparent loss either of health, briskness, or comfort. But when a man, who has power over his own will, and is perfectly justified, if he thinks proper, in a moderate use of fermented drinks, sees that by his personal surrender of liberty, in what to him is innocent, but for his friend perilous, he can help his friend to abstain from it, and by both the sympathy and companionship in it, keep him true to his purpose—there is as good an instance as can be found whether of St. Paul refusing to eat meat lest he should make his brother stumble, or of washing a disciple's feet, as the Lord did here.

Happy is the family where husband, wife, brother, sister, master, and servant dwell together in the godly unity of a common striving after holiness. Blessed is the Church which has learned how to exercise, without fear of misrepresentation from without, or of schism from within, this function of discipline for Christ.

Here, to complete this part of the subject, I would indicate another important detail in this ministry of mutual edification which ought not to be passed over in silence, merely because some abuse it, and others misunderstand it, and others who have never tried it condemn it unheard. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" [James v. 16]. It is, of course, the case that the precept, as we read it in these homely words of the Apostle, simply inculcates a private Christian duty between individual believers; and says nothing about a formal absolution by a minister of Christ. That, here, is neither enjoined, nor forbidden; simply it was not before the writer's mind. He thinks of a friend's service, not a priestly office. Now, do we Christians avail ourselves of this help as we ought—the young especially? for it is both easier and more helpful for them. It is certain that we do not, and we may be great losers thereby. A friend who will not despise us for our weakness, nor disown us for our sinfulness, nor tire of us for being troublesome, nor scoff at us for our sensibility, but who will patiently hear our tale,

readily understand our regret, easily recognise our stumbling-blocks; and be honest enough to tell us the truth, cost us what it may—do not you see what a real help he might be to us; just because he loves us, understanding us so thoroughly, and because he loves Christ, anxious to deliver us out of what puts Him to shame. Then when our tale is told, and the counsel given, if all is ended with tender and fervent prayer, the conscience lightened of its burden hates sin more keenly than ever, the heart with the sunshine of God's face on it is bright with the Saviour's presence, and made glad of the sympathy of a friend, whose holy love represents Him to us.

No one, indeed, will be so foolish as to suppose that talking about our faults is the only or even the best way of getting rid of them, or helping our brother to get rid of his. It is quite conceivable that some of us need checking rather than encouraging in this matter. Vanity creeps in everywhere; and can feed itself even on the story of sin. But do we, as we might, avail ourselves of each other's help in our spiritual difficulties? Here as elsewhere does not God often aid us through the ministry of man?

Of course there are other ways of ministering to each other, and of washing the brethren's feet.

Encouraging to good works, storing up grace in the heart by good conversation, inviting to intercessory prayer, are ways obvious and familiar to us all. What I chiefly want to urge is, that Christians fail in methodically and continuously and devoutly helping each other in the arduous effort after personal holiness. The Church is a society; and our Christian life ought to have more of the social element in it. When we walk alone, frost more easily gets both into the limbs and heart. Now this would not be, if we had more love. The first thing, and the last we have to do, is to love each other. Until we love each other we shall be at no pains to bring each other nearer to God. When we do, we shall enter into each other's difficulties, and bear with shortcomings, while we see the error and hate the sin. To love—here is at once the difficulty of our life, and yet the nobleness of it. Yet if God so loved us [1 John iv. 11], we ought also to love one another; and if His love was made perfect in the revelation of His Godhead, our

love to each other must be the continual work of His grace.

THE words have also a *Doctrinal* doctrinal significance, and *value of the* in more respects than one. *incident.*

Thoughtful divines have constantly recognized in this incident, and the teaching that goes with it, a close connection not only with Holy Baptism, but with the entire economy of grace in the continual cleansing of the imperfect but faithful soul. If there is no such thing as spiritual cleansing in baptism, Ananias's direction to Saul, already quoted, has no meaning, and it becomes an empty and disappointing formalism. Surely, to the faithful recipient of that Divine ordinance a free forgiveness is assured. "One baptism for the remission of sins" is the expression of the Catholic faith; and while the baptism cannot be repeated, that primal forgiveness is pledge and first-fruits of pardon renewed, bestowed as frailty requires and repentance prepares. In Holy Communion, while we ask, "So to eat the flesh of Jesus Christ and to drink His blood, that our sinful bodies may be made

clean by His body, and our souls washed through His most precious blood," we can plead it as our ground of access, make it a sacrifice of thanksgiving, only when it is first a season of penitence. Claiming our privilege as children, we will always remember that the possibilities of the prodigal are deep within our souls; called to be saints, let us ask for the power of the resurrection continually to deliver us from the bondage of indwelling sin. Perhaps we none of us know what we miss through lack of explicit and detailed and honest and sorrowful confession of sin. Yet to the English Churchman the service of Holy Communion, with its ample opportunities for private and close reflection, would bring much more solid and vivid comfort, if there were less desultoriness and more effort for detailed prayer.

When the Lord was approaching St. Peter to wash his feet, and the apostle resisted Him, it became necessary to vindicate with a kind of sternness the province and duty of faith. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter" [John xiii. 7]. The Lord's meaning is plain. His word, and His

character behind it, were to be the ground of the apostle's obedience.

Assurance. The incident may explain something of the true doctrine of assurance* in its blessed reasonableness, its objective basis, its personal verification, and its occasional disturbances. Nothing is in itself more reasonable than that a Christian man should desire a sense of acceptance with God. It is at once his encouragement to obedience, his stimulus to goodness, and the secret of his testimony to the world. "Grant, we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind" [Collect for 21st Sunday after Trinity]. But there is an immature peace, which is not generated by a true repentance. There is an insecure peace, which does not spring from the favour of God. The false assurance rests on something within us. The true on some one without and above us. The assurance of my own feeling may be the heated creation of

* See for another statement on this subject, "The Presence of Christ," chap. i.

a deluded fancy. The assurance of faith rests as on a rock upon the Person and Word of God.

Christ has died for me, and risen again. He invites me to come to Him, to rest on Him, to believe His love, to accept His salvation, to receive His grace, to bear His yoke. I will believe His love, on the authority of His word, far above what I can either ask or think. I accept the salvation which the voice of His quickening Spirit has made a supreme necessity to my conscience, and, by methods chosen by Himself, has brought home to my heart. I receive His grace, through the channels He has ordained for it, themselves important witnesses of His life and purpose—the Word and Sacraments—careful not to measure it by my own unaccountable and uncontrollable feelings at the moment, but by His own promise to be present with His ordinances. I accept His yoke, perhaps not too cheerfully at first. Yet the more readily I carry it, the more He blesses me, and the wider the freedom that I feel. As to its verification, what is the tenor of my life, and the main direction of my will? The play of my

feelings may vary, as the clouds on the mountain-side, or the hues of the tossing sea, and the fault be none of mine. But if my will be true, that is all that really matters. Disturbance there may be, perhaps there must be. Sometimes as the trial of our faith, sometimes as the recognition of faithful endurance, sometimes, let it be confessed, from slackened devotion, grave inconsistency, indulged infirmity. Then it is God's kind and holy frown. Perhaps the soul that has always the same amount of assurance about God, and of communion with Him, may have reason to doubt the soundness of the one, and even the existence of the other. While the soul, that just because it is conscious of its own changeableness, rests on God's unchangeableness, shall learn habitually to look away from itself, and all its faults and caprices, simply and uninterruptedly to gaze on the Lord.

One more thought, an awful one, for it involves terrible issues, yet so much in front among the controversies of the time, that one who presumes to write about forgiveness, could hardly pass it over, without, at least, one word to counsel, though not to explain.

A disciple was present at that Paschal Supper, of whom it was said by one who knows, “Good were it for that man if he had never been born” [Mark xiv. 21]. Truly awful words. Of a certain sin, that against the Holy Ghost, the same gentle holy Saviour warned His hearers that it hath no forgiveness, not in this world, nor in the world to come [Matt. xii. 32]. Again the apostle of love, St. John, in his general Epistle, carefully distinguishes between sins about which we may pray, and a sin “unto death” [1 John v. 16]—I do not say he shall pray for it.

Of course we know that there are two great lines of thought on this question of the final restoration of the lost; each nobly jealous for the character of God, and yearning for the salvation of man. One of them feels outraged by the supposed injustice to His mercy in the prospect of a hopeless exile from His face and service, for those who pass away in impenitence. The other is so profoundly impressed by the unspeakable, inconceivable evil and consequences of sin in the universe, and its detestableness before Almighty God, that even to try to open a door of mercy which

seems closed, may mean to make light of what God abhors.

Both, however, readily admit the extreme peril of going one hair's breadth beyond the Saviour's own utterances on this matter; also the unconscious yet real presumptuousness of attempting to protect God's character from His own revelation of it, or to make human mercy and human righteousness more merciful and more righteous than His.

There can be no doubt that Holy Scripture, from the tender lips of the Saviour, contains awful warnings about the final condition of the wicked, which it is a sort of impiety to explain away, and a grave irreverence to suppose to have been uttered merely to frighten us. When He who so loved Jerusalem, that He died for it, wept over it because He could not save it, were those dramatic tears? "Doubtless God has so surprised us by His former acts of grace, by such an inconceivable interposition in the Incarnation and the Cross, that it does not become us to say that anything is impossible with Him, except to deny Himself. But still less does it become us, creatures such as we are, who know so little,

whose hearts and minds are so feebly under control, whose wills are so treacherous, whose passions are so blinding, either to narrow or enlarge His words. If, indeed, He has told us of more than we supposed His words to mean, in God's name let it be shown. If not, let us take care what we are doing. We may be claiming to be wiser than the wisest, more loving than the most loving, who even on earth partially lifted the veil from the unseen world; and, in parable and vision, disclosed its awful secrets." *

Silence for those who dare not add to a book, which, in their judgment, at this page has been deliberately closed, trust from those whose personal experience of God's love and righteousness make them infinitely and immovably sure, that God will in the end justify Himself as merciful and true before the entire universe, diligence unwearied and tender, from all who love God and hate sin, and wish to make their brethren's risks as little as they can, by doing their best both to bring them unto light and love—here seems to me to be

* Dean Church's Oxford Sermon, p. 119. [The entire sermon should be read].

the true and humble wisdom of the servants of God. To preach the Gospel of One, who is mighty to save, and who to the last, though in vain, tried to save even Judas, with unfaltering boldness to proclaim the sinfulness of sin, and its awful unknown reward, here and hereafter, is our twofold and solemn duty. Here, also, to leave it, with Him who is both Saviour and Judge. The Gospel of mercy to tender and gentle hearts will ever be a more congenial theme; but the Gospel of holiness is at least as needful. Only in the concord of the Divine Perfections, only in the full and unflinching declaration of a full-orbed doctrine, is the secret of a right judgment to be found.

“Discourses about the restoration of all things, are about something that we have not the least knowledge of, or any faculties or foundation for such knowledge; we have nothing certain or plain within ourselves about it, and so have nothing to oppose to anything that is told us. The irrecoverable state of men or angels is a dreadful thought to us; our sense of misery, tenderness, and compassion for our fellow-creatures makes us wish that no creatures should fall into it, and

we are unable to show how such a state should result from the infinite wisdom, goodness, and perfection of God. But then we must consider that we are here governed by our passions and weakness, and only form a God according to our own conceptions. For my own part, this one saying, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right,' is a stronger support to my mind, and a better guard against all anxiety than the deepest discoveries that the most speculative, inquisitive minds could help me to. With this one assurance of the infinitely infinite goodness of God, I resign up myself, my friends, relatives, men, and angels to the adorable, yet incomprehensible disposal of His wisdom."*

Lastly, is any reader of this book sore and wounded by the thought of past unworthiness; whose reason tells him, that even God cannot make it as though it had not been, but that nothing can be done now to repair or diminish what has been written down in the Books that are to be opened? Well, my brother or my sister, I have a Gospel for you. Be humble and gentle, be charitable and for-

* Rev. W. Law.

bearing, ever considering, when others fall, your own past need of mercy, and how great a forgiveness God has bestowed on you.

But also be bright and fearless, manful and strong. If you can humbly look up in your Saviour's face, because on your confession and repentance, He has cast your sins behind His back, surely you may look your neighbour in the face. If God for Christ's sake has consented to forgive you, surely your brother may. If not—"if God be for us, who can be against us?" [Rom. viii. 31]. You are not alone in your sinful history, nor in your past experience. Thousands and thousands share it with you, of whom the Church and the world dream not. In the great multitude which no man can number, plucked as brands from the burning, everlasting monuments of infinite grace, will be David and the Magdalen, the great Augustine, and the author of "The Pilgrim's Progress"; also a host of purified souls that deeply sinned and passionately repented, whose early transgressions have been equitably and generously forgotten in the grand usefulness of their after lives and the sweet fragrance of their sanctity.

The more you have been forgiven, so much the more thereby you know of God's patience and compassion ; so much greater the burden laid on you of confessing about it to others. As to your Heaven, be sure of this, that whatever your present sadness, or still unhealed remorse, when once the welcome flashes on you from the face of the Lamb that was slain, there will be perfect soundness and cleanness in the presence of us all. As you look into your heart and feel no sin there ; as you wonder at the whiteness of your robe, and find no stain there, the sentence will steal unto your heart and heal it for ever, " Clean every whit."

IV.

DISCIPLINE.

“SHOW ME WHEREFORE THOU CONTENDEST WITH ME.”

“The whole wisdom and magnanimity of life consist in a will conformed to what is, with a heart ready for what is not.”



DO you condemn that prayer? Why? To me, indeed, it seems

Job's question reasonable.

the most reasonable and natural and becoming and religious thing a sorrowful man could do. Reasonable, because God's contention with him was a plain intimation that he had something to say to him; and how could he discover what it was unless he asked? Natural, for is not that just what we desire and expect from our own children when we contend with them? It must happen sometimes with the best children and the kindest parents, either that some indulgence has to be

withheld, or some task imposed, or some reserve manifested, or some refusal given. Well, what does a parent wish for under such circumstances? That the child so dealt with should go on in its daily routine with a cold or flippant indifference, or that it should quickly and earnestly inquire, "What have I done?" Becoming, for this reason. The wisdom of man is in the knowledge of God; and the better we know Him the wiser we become. But the knowledge of God, just like any other knowledge, will not come to us simply by our sitting before the fire and feebly wishing to be wise. The human soul is not a dead reservoir, but a living organ. Most of all is such a question eminently religious when it has a right motive beneath it, and a true purpose in front. What is the right notion of religion? Surely the apprehending of God, that we may serve Him and enjoy Him. Yet what is the way of the great mass of mankind? Is it not to do their best to forget Him, to use Him for need and sorrow, to ignore Him in health and prosperity—never to take the trouble of asking Him questions of any kind—never to try to creep

nearer to see the glory of His face? But then you may ask, Did Job put this question in quite a proper manner? Well, I am not concerned to go into that. I fear that even the nobleman in the Gospel may have been guilty of a little bluntness, when with his child's life quivering in the balance, he took no notice of the Lord's remark about signs and wonders, just blurted out, "Sir, come down ere my child die." The Saviour does not appear to have taken offence at it. That troubled majestic soul may possibly have expressed itself with heat and even anguish. His body was consumed with disease. His spirit was blistered with the cruel provocations of his friends. Everything in life he cared for seemed gone. Even his own wife had given him up, instead of strengthening and consoling him. Was he to lose God as well? His heart said no to that; "O God, do not Thou condemn me; rather show me wherefore Thou contendest with me."

Now let us think out together the true answer to this question, suggested to us all in turn by the trials of life. Only the area in which our inquiry shall move must be a lit-

tle wider than Job's. A careful study of the patriarch's history makes it plain that the main object of the Divine purpose in Job's trials was to show that there is such a thing possible as disinterested love to God. "Doth Job serve God for nought" [Job i. 9] was the coarse and bitter sneer of the adversary. Try and see, replied Jehovah. The result is before us; on the whole Job did, and, in God's never-failing righteousness, a plentiful recompense was requited him for having been made what some might call the victim of an important experiment for the Church at large. For he was even more blessed in the end than in the beginning, and no saint in all the Bible attracts more of our sympathy, or deserves more of our imitation, than this grand tried man.

Already I have said that we are each to try to find the true answer to this question, whenever it comes home to ourselves. But we shall have no answer *unless we do ask for it*. Always let us ask, and at once. In that case we may be sure of one; for Job, you see, got his, though slowly and gradually. Certainly he would not have got it had he been wrong in

asking for it. Sooner or later we, too, shall have ours, though should we have to wait longer for it than we like, it may be our Lord saying to us: "Tarry thou my leisure, be strong, and I will comfort thy heart."

How does God contend with us?

God's ways of contending. To select five instances out of many: He deals with us in the sphere of the mind through mystery, in the sphere of the affections through bereavement, in the sphere of the body through sickness, in the sphere of the will through disappointment, in the sphere of the conscience through remorse. Not necessarily with any of us in all these ways, though some of us know a little about them all; seldom by more than one of them at once, perhaps never with many, or we should die. But ever as a wise and kind physician, He deals out to each of us the individual treatment that precisely suits us. As a refiner of silver He waits till He can see His own image reflected in us; and instantly takes us out when the refining is done.

Mystery. In the sphere of the understanding He contends with us through mystery, which, while it does not

make an utter darkness, impresses us with the profoundness of our ignorance, and of our utter incapacity quite to escape it. The vastness of nature, the presence of evil, the future of mankind, the fact of conscience, the power of circumstances, the instinct of immortality, apart, and together; in a word, the incessant and insoluble problems of the universe, sometimes fall on man's spirit, depressing action if not compelling despair. Within the sphere of dogma such lofty and critical truths as the Godhead of Christ, and the nature of the atonement, and the value of the sacraments, to sensitive souls that love the truth, and in consequence of that love, prize it so highly that they dare not be easily sure of having attained it, mean mental conflict—sometimes spiritual—amounting to agony. We honour them for it, and dare not hurry nor judge them, while we would gladly welcome them into our light. To them it is a fiery trial. Or former convictions come suddenly to be in a state of flux. Principles, thought to be settled long ago, are painfully disturbed by a doubt that hamstrings our firm hold of them. Nothing seems certain but that nothing can be

proved. We were born and we shall die. Of what else can we be sure?

Bereavement. In the sphere of the affections

bereavement. God contends with us through *bereavement.* What love in all the world is so God-like, so exquisite, so pure, so unselfish, as the love of an affectionate parent for a precious child; especially if there is but one parent left, who feels to owe the debt of a doubtful tenderness!

The infant has our caresses; but as infancy passes into childhood, and childhood slowly matures into responsible youth, this love is deepened by sympathy, rooted in augmenting experience, cemented by association, beatified by the joy of mutual sacrifice. The child, growing into the companion, presently becomes the friend. The daughter takes the mother's place by the side of her father; the son makes a strong arm on which his widowed mother can lean. Then into this sweet Paradise creeps the cold shadow of disease; and the beloved child, like some sweet jasmine, cut by an early frost, pales, sickens, withers, at last dies; and it is a loss which nothing afterwards fills up or ought to fill up; a grief

which gnaws the heart with a corroding sadness. "I will go down into the grave unto my son, mourning" [Gen. xxxvii. 35]. Jacob's complaint is the soul's first, and sometimes abiding consolation in the loyalty of a passionate sorrow.

In the sphere of the body, He contends with us through sick- *Sickness.* ness. This, in Job's case, was the final calamity that crushed him to the earth, about which the mysterious adversary, malignant in his vast experience of human nature, eagerly said to Jehovah, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life" [Job ii. 4]. Observe further that this is true, not so much or only because a man's selfishness resents with especial keenness what so intimately touches the vital springs of his being, but because the body, being the material shrine or organ, both of his domestic affections, and his mental endowments and his personal enjoyments, and his daily activities, in sickness the wheels of life are for the moment paralyzed, by death finally stayed. In clouding our intellect, in depressing our energies, in interrupting our duties, in suspending our pleasures, sickness

at once diminishes our dignity and impairs our usefulness.

Yet it is not so much in what it causes now as in what it threatens presently that its keenest sting is to be found. Across the distant future the sick man sends the messengers of uneasy and trembling conjectures to ask if a cloud is rising over the sea. It may not come to-day, nor to-morrow; but there is a morrow when it must come, be our children reared or not reared, be our life's task finished, or only one-third done. The vapour, no bigger than a man's hand, is already on the horizon for some one who reads these words; when it begins to climb the sky, and the rapid scud floats over the azure, we know what it means: we are in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

*Disappoint-
ment.*

In the sphere of the will He contends with us (to take one instance only) through disappointment. It may be some coveted promotion, a post we could suitably fill, and perhaps deserve to fill, a distinction which would carry with it the approval of a laborious life. When we are denied it, a sense of injustice wounds us, for in such moments an exaggerated self-consciousness

makes us forget that there are others in the world meritorious like ourselves. It seems a very thankless task, again to begin to roll the stone up a hill which it will never clamber. The heart wraps up itself in its pride, and tries, in vain, to be content. Or the prize, which we thought, could we gain it, would make our life a long midsummer, now that it is ours, turns out no prize at all, and a tie indissoluble, and with no place for repentance, is the secret worm of our life's content. Of all fatal errors in this world, and the only wonder is that it is not multiplied ten thousandfold, the most fatal and the most sorrowful is that of an unhappy marriage. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and self-respect keeps it a hidden bitterness. Yet bitter it is, and with no hope about it, where a gulf separates two natures which never can know sympathy; still worse, if to scorn is added cruelty, not indeed of hands, but of sharp and poisoned words.

In the sphere of conscience
He contends with us by the *Sense of sin.*
sense of sin. This was eminently the case
with Job. It is always more or less the case,

even with those who personally know Him as God that pardoneth iniquity ; how much more with those, to whose inmost spirit the fact and guilt and consequences of sin have yet to be brought home !

In some respects this is the most awful and intolerable of all—let me add, the most blessed. For a human soul to be brought face to face with the awful holiness of God, and to be made to see the moral chasm between what He is and what they find themselves ; to come to see for the first time what sin deserves, and righteousness demands, and God remembers, and memory recalls, and conscience admits, and perhaps neighbours whisper : to be dumb before Him, since no denial is possible, and be abashed before Him, since there is no excuse to make ! When God contended with Saul, he remained three days, and did neither eat nor drink ; from Job the answer was, “ I am vile, what shall I answer Thee ; I will lay my hand on my mouth ” [Job xl. 4].

Christian reader, when thou passest through this consuming fire, do not wish to quench it, do not fear its shrivelling thee into dust. The holiness of thy Father is contending with

thee, that thou mayest presently partake of it—listen to it, it speaks in love; let the one name thou namest be that of Jesus; thy one humble pleading, “Is there not forgiveness with thee, therefore thou mayest be feared.”

What then—if such thy lot—thou seest thy Judge,
 The sight of Him will kindle in thy heart
 All tender, gracious, reverential thoughts.
 Thou wilt be sick with love, and yearn for Him,
 And feel as though thou could'st but pity Him,
 That one so sweet should e'er have placed Himself
 At disadvantage, such as to be used
 So vilely by a being so vile as thee,
 And thou wilt hate and loathe thyself;

 and wilt desire
 To slink away, and hide thee from His sight;
 And yet wilt have a longing eye to dwell
 Within the beauty of His countenance.
 And these two pains, so counter and so keen,
 The longing for Him, when Thou seest Him not,
 The shame of self at thought of seeing Him—
 Will be thy veriest, sharpest purgatory.

—DREAM OF GERONTIUS.

For why does God contend? *Why does God*
 Through mystery He would dis- *contend?*
 cipline faith, yes, and in some of us, character.
 Surely it is better to think and to be troubled

by our thinking, than not to think and have the base peace of a brute. Bishop Butler, with that tenderness which sometimes characterizes really great thinkers, has suggested (as many of us will remember) that difficulties of belief may not only be permitted, but intended for the temptation of characters of a certain type, to which coarser temptations would have no attraction. Let us not for a moment suppose that God discourages the use of reason. Why should He disown perhaps the noblest of His own gifts? Nor does He depreciate knowledge. The more we have of it, and of all sorts, the better. Nor does it displease Him that we ask questions. Perhaps what He desires is that we should ask more, if only they are of the sort that can be answered. For to give us answers that would be beyond us, would be no kindness at all. But He would have us see that our faculties are of necessity limited; and that it is both our wisdom and our dutifulness to accept the limitation of them. In the sphere of Revelation the laws of physical research do not hold. For the indispensable method of educating the spiritual nature of man is faith.

To recognize what we cannot explain, and to consent that it should not be explained, is the humility of true wisdom. To accept what we could not otherwise have known, on the authority of God's revealed word, is the obedience of Faith.

Through bereavement God would stir *love*—love to Himself. It is sometimes said in a loose and shallow—yes, and cruel way—that bereavements are a divine protest against idolatry. Occasionally this may be true, but very often they are not protests at all. To the soul transplanted into Paradise, it means a gracious welcome into the joy of the Lord. To those left behind it is the silent appeal of an unspeakable tenderness. “Lovest thou me?” God does not grudge us our human love. I protest against that thought as a libel upon Him. He has made us and commanded us to love each other. This would be a far better and happier world if there were more love in it instead of less. The more we love each other, the more we fulfil His purpose and resemble Himself. But He does claim the *first* place in our regard, and the only altar in our home; and it is a question if

He often gets it, or even can get it, till He comes Himself to ask for it with a voice there is no resisting. While we may safely cherish the memory of those who are taken even with a sad and passionate tenderness, we are also to listen to the voice that whispers to us in our sorrow, "Thy brother shall rise again—now, be more to ine."

Through sickness He would compel dependence. Here let us be quite honest. Unless fear startled us, or pain unnerved us, or mortality overshadowed us, what a Godless world this redeemed earth would be! But for sickness, there would be no mile-stones to tell us of the ever-nearing Eternity. But for sickness, we should never know either God's power or man's love.

Another reason for discipline is to enable us, through a quickened sympathy with those who suffer, and a personal gratefulness for God's unspeakable tenderness, to "comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" [2 Cor. i. 4].

"Are the consolations of God small with thee?" [Job xv. 11] is a very searching question

sometimes put to us by others, better still by ourselves, and what answer can we give to it? As hinted elsewhere, there is a vicarious element in all holy sorrow, not indeed to help us to atone, but to understand and heal; for to know how to comfort is one of the rarest as well as blessedest of the Christian virtues. It is not only saying the right thing, but saying it in the right way, and at the right moment. Nay, sometimes it is not speaking at all—silence may be its most expressive channel. The look of the eye, the pressure of the hand, the very feeling that your mere presence creates of intelligent, if helpless, sadness is comfort. You cannot do it unless you have been through trouble yourself; nay, it takes years to acquire the subtle tact to feel the moment when you have said enough, and had better go away. Indeed, this art of consolation is a delicate art, only learned in the school of Christ, and its secret is love, built on experience. For when He consoles, we learn and see it all. Who consoles like Him? It is worth a good deal of trouble to learn to feel sin hateful, and to come to measure the world at its true worth, as a weaned child to rest

softly on the bosom of God, and to feel Heaven so real and so near, that to go there at once would only be like stepping into the next room. To be taught truly to say to God, "Thou art my portion," and thereby to learn how to press it on others, is worth the heaped-up sorrows of a life. No one can comprehend the Divine tenderness but those whose souls have been drenched with it. Christ is so gentle, that He is like a mother hanging over us; so humble, that He patiently waits our time till we turn and listen; so compassionate, that He is ready to have us on any terms; so filled with kindness, that we seem to hear Him say, "Come as you are, and say what you will, only trust me."

Once more, through various disappointments, He would have us search the motives of our conduct, analyse its principles, count up its mercies, and understand its reward. Sometimes they come to test us. Are we serving God for Himself or for His gifts? With all of us, motives are mixed. Still, does self *preponderate*? Sometimes they are harbingers of success; and a brief chagrin, resisted with manliness and effaced by generos-

ity, soon is surprised by the final accomplishment of its hopes. Sometimes it is to give the soul a great opportunity of surrendering its will to God, and of saying, "only Thyself." Always it must be to stir prayer, to purify conduct, to make us touch the sceptre of the King, offering better things presently, with the joyous grasp of faith. "It is better," says to itself the chastened soul, "as it is, though I could never have chosen it for myself, and could not safely be consulted as to its disappearing. God has chosen for me, and the spaces of eternity are before Him, and it is all an education for the real life in front. I am glad that He should choose; and if in a momentary petulance I fret at His will, He will remember that I am only a child; and will not hastily confound a transient impatience with a deliberate rebelliousness."

Lastly, through a sense of sin He would ripen holiness and deepen humility, and promote a stern, watchful self-control. Job, as you will observe, if you read the book carefully, never denied that he was a sinner. In one of his saddest appeals, he expressly says to God, "Thou makest me to possess the in-

iniquities of my youth" [Job xiii. 26]. Really all that he did say was, that his manhood had been upright and pure. Well, if it had been, it had been; and for him to have admitted that it had been otherwise would have been weakly consenting to a lie. But his friends, who could not explain his calamities otherwise than as the Divine visitation of some terrible though unknown iniquity, insisted on his confessing what had never happened; and he would have died sooner than do that. "Till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me" [Job xxvii. 5]. Was he not right? Clearly he was. What, then, was Job's error and necessity? His error was that he set too much store by his beneficent and upright life, and that he had not learnt enough of the Divine righteousness and of his own vast imperfection to set his personal goodness at its right value. His necessity was to have a deeper sense of the sinfulness of sin, and a more humbling estimate of his own goodness. Therefore God in His great love to him brought back his sin to his remembrance, and made him mourn afresh, not because it had not been already pardoned, rather just

because it was and in the end, out of a humbled and broken heart, the great patriarch, like a sorrowful and chastened child, sobbed out his memorable confession into the ear of his Father: "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" [Job xlii. 5, 6].

"Heaven is not mounted to on wings of dreams,
Nor doth the unthankful happiness of youth
Aim thitherward, but floats from bloom to bloom,
With earth's warm patch of sunshine well content.
'Tis sorrow builds the shining ladder up,
Whose golden rounds are our calamities,
Whereon our firm feet planting, nearer God
The spirit climbs, and hath its eyes unsealed."

—LOWELL.

One other reason for discipline I have kept to the last, for there is a good deal to say about it, and it is a blessed Gospel for us all.

YOU remember Christ's question to Philip on the night of the betrayal: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me?" [John xiv. 9]. *Slowness in learning Christ.* Evidently the real spirit of that

question was a pained surprise. Surprise, for in the perfectness of His humanity it simply amazed Him that one who for so long had observed His acts, heard His words, and enjoyed His society, could so feebly have comprehended the motive and the nature of His work. Pained surprise, for in this strange, dull slowness, there was not altogether lacking the element of sin. Once before, indeed, He had asked of them as a body: "How is it that ye do not understand?" [Mark viii 21]. It is fair to observe that those were early days of excusable ignorance. But in the last six months both His discourses and miracles ought to have opened a new window into Heaven.

Had there been more devotion, there might have been more intelligence; for though love cannot create ideas, it sets them moving and burning. In truth, it was just one more thorn in that crown of sharpness which had begun to pierce His brow.

But we must not linger in that upper chamber, with all its holy, though mournful memories. Across the silent years that separate us from the Apostles, that question descends

to us, and Jesus, though crowned with glory, still sadly asks those who profess to believe on Him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not known me?"

Now there are two chief thoughts in these words, gleaming with searching light, both on heart and conscience. One is the fact, of vital significance, that it is quite possible for us to be with Christ, and for Christ to be with us, and yet for us not really to know Him. The other, its correlative—the discovery of which is the first beating of our conscious spiritual life, as the going on to master it is the perfection of its strength—is, that the only true way of knowing Christ is to see Him as the Revelation of the Father. Here is the Gospel indeed.

"So long time." Here, of course, is the sting of the reproach. Doubtless He had been with others also, and to no better purpose. He had been with the multitudes who thronged and pressed Him, but did not reach Him with the touch of faith. He had drawn to His side a rich young man, who admired Him enough to consent to some sacrifice for Him, yet could not sufficiently trust Him to

surrender all. A scribe had cordially praised Him, and was told that he was on the edge of the kingdom, though not yet quite inside it. The children sang Hosanna in the Temple; and the officers sent to seize Him were spell-bound. Yet all went for nothing, when His foes hemmed Him in for His final Passion. The rays of His Divine glory had fallen on those hard hearts as an Arctic sunbeam on icebergs. They flashed and glittered, yet when night came it found them frozen still. But for St. Peter, who had confessed His Godhead, and for Thomas, who had proposed to go and die with Him, and for Philip, whom He had taken such special pains to choose—for these not yet to have discerned in Him the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth, must have brought to the great Teacher's heart one of those pangs of disappointment which those who try to serve Him now find so hard to bear.

Yet the lesson which this fact discloses, and of which it is the inevitable correlative, is of more moment still. Philip had said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us" [John xiv. 8]. O surely it was a lofty prayer,

and we may be thankful to catch something of the nobleness of its spirit. Yet it showed an ignorance of Christ, of which more among us are guilty than we suspect. For there are various ways of knowing Christ, and they are all good in their way, if only they are vitalized with that spiritual apprehension of Him which is Eternal Life. Without it, they are but as the paper and ink of a mouldy parchment.

We may know Him "after the flesh," as Judas Iscariot knew Him, and yet smoothly kissed Him to His Cross. We may know Him sacramentally in the corporate knitting of our redeemed nature to His Incarnate Person, and yet the outward incorporation may never become truly consummated by quickening and perfecting grace. We may know Him dogmatically, and have all the glorious truths of the Catholic Creed in our mind and on our lips; and yet some day He may be forced to say, "I never knew you, for you have never known me by love." Christian reader, do you really care to know how you must know Him if you would escape that reproach? He tells us here, further on, "He that hath seen me

hath seen the Father" [John xiv. 9]. You ask, "How is He the Revelation of the Father; how you and I and all of us, now as well as then, hereafter as well as to-day, can discover in Jesus of Nazareth the mind and character of God?" Let me give two instances now. Several others may occur to us further on. He was a revelation of His Father's Providence in the government of the world, which did not make things easier or pleasanter for Him, though He was the Son of His Eternal Love, bent on doing His will. It sent Him to poverty and toil and misinterpretation, and that mournful, awful solitariness which is ever the penalty, and reward, and sure mark of lofty, saintly souls, moving on in front of their time. It did not spare Him anything painful, did not recompense Him with outward human delights because of His righteousness, did not prevent sorrow nor banish care. The "all things" were the same for Him, as for any one else, nothing softened, nothing altered. He was also the revelation of His Father's Nature, which, described in a single word, is Love. As in Him we see the ideal for man accomplished, so we see the Perfection of God

revealed ; and His human life is the mirror in which perfect man and perfect God are shown. God's love is of course mainly set forth in His bountifulness and compassion, and firmness and patience, and wisdom and strength : but most of all (for a moment to anticipate the following chapter) in His spirit of sacrifice. No one is a true parent who is not capable of sacrifice for his children ; and this must not be merely because he desires thereby to win and enlarge their love, for then it would only be a subtle selfishness. Besides, they will never love their parents as their parents love them ; it is idle, if not unreasonable, to expect it. But because they are ours and God's choicest gift to us, and we desire their highest welfare, we are content to suffer for their sake. This thought is surely contained in St. Paul's expression, indicating, in the Father of our spirits giving His Son for us, the unspeakable value and meaning of that sacrifice. "He that spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" [Rom. viii. 32]. Here is the Gospel indeed ! The Father's heart towards His Son, when the

sense of His Father's presence was no longer felt by Him, at the time when He most needed it, and (if human language on such a matter be not presumptuous) most deserved it; who shall fathom the tenderness in it, or expound the mystery of that awful loneliness? What we *can* imagine is, what it would cost any of us to refuse the consolation of our love to a child, at the moment he was dying to serve us; what we are intended to observe, is the greatness of the love that perfected the redemption of men! But we shall dwell on this again.

Christian reader, I dare to hope that if you have been in any sort of way trying to understand this question of Christ, and what comes out of it, you will have been set thinking as to its possible relation to you, and what that Voice says to your own spirit. Anyhow, do not say, "It is not for me." It is indeed. With the great bulk of intelligent Christian people, Christ has been more or less present from their earliest lives. He has incorporated them into the baptismal fellowship, dealt with them by the influences of His Holy Spirit, stirred them with gladness, searched them

with sorrow. His Name has been the precious birthright of their Christian heritage; and His life the sublime ideal of a matchless goodness elevating their daily existence, even in its homeliest features, with a tender and dignified beauty. His words have become part of their mental wealth. When they have wanted Him He has ever been at hand to soothe and heal. When they have not wanted Him He has patiently waited until they call on Him, and the question is, what are they really the better for this divine nearness and love?

This knowledge of Christ must be a *separate* and *individual* knowledge. Each must know

What our knowledge of Christ must be.

Him for himself in the separate region of his own spirit. It must be a knowledge of *experience*, not of what others have learnt and written, but of what we have known and tasted; not of what others have had from Him and enjoyed in Him, but as the Samaritan said, "Now we believe not because of Thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves" [John iv 42]. Especially it must be a knowledge *that helps us to be like Him*. Mere theology

will not make us like Him. The chief priests of His day were the foremost theologians of their time, and carefully sent the wise men to Bethlehem to find the King of the Jews. Yet their knowing the text of inspired prophecy did not help them spiritually to interpret it. In the end they slew Him, because whether the prophets witnessed to Him or not, He was not the King for them. Theology can indeed touch His raiment, and describe it. It cannot reach His life. Truly to know Him is to know Him as Saviour, Master, and friend. Saviour, because we have suffered Him to have all His blessed way with us; and so He has saved us from our sins, and told us so, and made us free. Master, in appointing to us our proper place in this vast creation, with our own task, and grace, and gift, and wages, and crown. Friend, in all the love that can glow in the nature of God and the heart of Man. Man with us, touched with the feeling of our infirmities; God in us, our righteousness, and strength, and shield.

Are there any who feel that through God's great mercy they do know something of Him, though nothing yet as they ought to know?

Sure that they wish to know more, they have been wishing it so long, and with such scanty result that they despair.

Well, there are several ways of meeting this difficulty. It is quite true that Christ Himself warned the Apostle, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now" [John xvi. 12]. Most assuredly we are all of us dull scholars at best; and sometimes it takes years to master but one law in God's spiritual kingdom. Truths that are clear to us now, were in thick mist ten years ago, with hardly the outline of their shape visible. What is misty to-day may suddenly clear to-morrow. We cannot learn everything at once; and the mind will not act as a machine. It has its caprices, or at least what look to be so; and its eccentric ways of acting; and it will neither be forced nor hurried. Moreover, it is not the only factor in our education. Time is a teacher; also circumstances, sorrow. It is also the case that the opportunity and capacity for knowing Christ vary in the individual, yes, and with the same individual. The mind has its fertile moments and its sterile. Some years have their oppor-

tune sowings and their harvests of plenty. Then there is a change: and to the barns filled with last year's wheat the hungry soul must go. None of these things, however, need make us afraid. God, our Father, *who means us to know Him*, and takes His time about it, being the wisest as well as the kindest of teachers; having also all Eternity in front wherein to teach us, takes note of all these things, and will not suffer them to hurt us, will only judge us by what we have been able to learn. The Psalmist gives us the key, "Delight thyself also in the Lord" [Ps. xxxvii 4]. Oh, with what a circumspect love we adore God! In an earlier chapter (p. 70) I have spoken about the power of loving Christ as a special grace to be asked of God. Let me here dwell on that one aspect of it which affects our knowledge of Him as the revelation of the Father. For we come to know Him exactly as we come to know each other by the best and quickest and deepest way of love. You never get thoroughly to understand an earthly friend till you really love him. Until you love God, and in measure as you love Him, will He be an abstract and aw-

ful idea, or a system of unattainable perfection, or a far-off righteousness, or an inflexible Fate—or a Father who pities, blesses, and saves.

When you begin really to love Him, the thick cold mists will slowly roll away, and the gulf between heaven and earth be bridged over. Problems will remain, but we shall feel there is a key to them somewhere. Duty will sometimes fatigue, and grief sadden us, and results disappoint, and faults humble. Yet, as the heart becomes enlarged, will God's service become perfect freedom; duty will be seen to be seed, the gleanings perhaps far hence, when the reapers and the sowers rejoice together before the Lord of the harvest.

It cannot always be summer-time in the soul, but in the darkest, gloomiest days of its winter, we shall always remember the clear glow of the bright sunlight and the wealth of God's smiles on the earth. These things will still be ours, and they are coming again. Nay, as if to prepare us for what may be coming—(was the Transfiguration, as some tell us, a Divine preparation not only for the Apostles, but for Jesus Himself before the

great travail came?)—there are moments, few and far between no doubt, in the religious consciousness of the devout Christian, when he sees Christ so vividly, and understands Him so intimately, and loves Him with so intense a love, that it seems caught from the saints in light; when so real, so near, is the felt tenderness of the Lord, that for the sake of that love, and in the mighty strength of it, he feels (God helping him) he could almost without an effort strip himself of every earthly delight; and go empty and barefoot, with ashes on his head, but gladness in his heart, until his home is in sight, and his Lord beckons him to His feet. But all this indicates, contains, and sets forth a secret and perhaps long discipline of the soul, without which such an experience of the possibilities of the love of Christ could be neither possible nor safe.

So we come back to the sentence with which we began, and *Conclusion.* from which, let us hope, we have not too far wandered, "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me."

Christian reader, while much is to be said

about God's general administration of His discipline, the precise object of it must vary with each individual, and it is a shallow, even a cruel rashness that presumes to explain all by one. Sometimes, no doubt, as when David's child died, it is the visitation of a special sin. Yet not always. To sum up, it may be for a truth that He would teach—or a gift that He would impart—or a duty which He would impose—or a dignity for which He would prepare. Also, let us not forget perhaps the most sublime of all. Parents come to know it, and not only parents. It was the lesson of Jesus and the wisdom of God. "There is one condition under *Mystery of* which all know that pain is not *pain.* truly an evil, but a good. This is when pain is willingly borne for another's sake."

It is our business, however, to ask Him, and He is sure to tell us, though often in an unlooked-for way. All God's controversies with man have two main ends: one in relation to others, the other in relation to ourselves; both, of course, converging in Him. To show us "that the best and greatest gift He can give us is the privilege He gave His Son,

to be used and sacrificed for the best and greatest end." Also, so to wean and purge and empty us of self and visible things, that our capacity may be deepened for the possession and fruition of Himself.

Therefore, O disciple of Christ, whatever happens to thee—God far away, life clouded or ebbing, friends misjudging thee, poisoned thoughts harassing thee, bodily weakness robbing life of its dignity, quickly passing years stealing away one by one the dear companions of thy youth and prime, doubts that chill, thoughts that defile, recollections that sadden, losses that depress, privileges thou canst no longer enjoy, duties thou canst but imperfectly perform—only let two thoughts fill thy heart and steady thy mind's tumult, and all shall be well.

As to the Church and world outside, now is the trial of thy faith that shall prove if faith is real and God is true. Let men see that thou hast a treasure in Heaven which awaits thee, and a power in faith which sustains thee, and a joy in prayer which exhilarates thee, and a tight grip of God which keeps thy chin high above the deepening waters, and gives thee

the peace which they envy and may learn from thee how to attain.

As for thine own soul, cleave steadfastly to God. He hath never forsaken thee yet, and He is not likely to forsake thee at the moment when thou most needest Him. Never was a human soul nearer a sorrowful shipwreck than Job was.


But a strong hand pulled him out of the deep waters, and set him on a rock and ordered his goings. What God did for him He will do for thee. He is not changed in His character, nor thou in thy necessity. Only for Job's faith there must be Job's discipline, and for Job's victory there must be Job's prayer.

V.

SACRIFICE.

"WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR US."

"Whatever else may pass or change, of this we may be sure, that till God cease to love us, we shall stand face to face with sacrifice."

HE Gospel is Christ's revelation of His Father's purpose for men. It is doctrine, because it gives us the original and essential account of God in His Personal relation to us. It is history, because it describes to us from the beginning how God has created, ruled, and redeemed us by His Son. It is law—though, indeed, the perfect law of liberty—because it authoritatively presses His claims on our obedience and gratitude. Let it be also observed that one part of this Gospel is as much good news as

another. What can be blessed for us than the lofty and inspiring ideas that convey to my intelligence the true conception of my Maker? What more consoling or more exemplary than the story of that unique life, which is at once the type and ideal of Love exhausting itself in sacrifice? What more elevating or heart-stirring than the claim which God makes on our spiritual being when approaching us in Christ? "Children, I love you. Jesus Christ, my Son, is the evidence and measure of it. Come back to me, and love me, and show your love by obedience."

Now, this Gospel will be best understood, through our first contemplating its completest manifestation in the story of the Passion; then, by our earnestly and honestly pondering how every regenerate soul is to embrace, assimilate, and reproduce the central idea of the Cross, in the hidden but crucified life of self-denial. "The utmost we now seem to attain is to love Him gratefully for rescuing us from all need of agony, so that we may pass from easy life here to easier life hereafter. When shall we begin to see that thus we pronounce our own sentence of apartness from

Him; that His ideal of blessedness is sacrifice absolute?"*

"Behold the man" [John xix. 5], said Pilate to the multitude, in a moment of vacillating pity. "Behold the man," whispers the Church, that thou mayest comprehend at once God's love and thine own sin.

Christ's sufferings, if pre-emi- *Christ's*
nently the sufferings of His Pas- *sufferings.*
sion, are not, of course, to be confined to them. In a real sense His whole life, though it had its deep under-currents of joy in doing the will and revealing the name of His Father, was, nevertheless, one unbroken trial. The "Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief" [Isa. liii. 3], as the Evangelical Prophet calls Him, in enduring the "contradiction of sinners against Himself" [Heb. xii. 3], suffered daily. Nor, again, are they the only sufferings that have the atoning value. Christ's work must not be halved like that. From the hour of His supernatural conception to the moment of His expiring on the cross, He was in the way of making reconciliation for sin, and bringing in everlasting righteousness.

* "Links and Clues."

But in view of the fact that man's sin and Satan's malice had their awful climax on the cross, the Divine Love made perfect in the offering of His innocent life may not inexactly be said to have had its final consummation and supreme manifestation there. Three times does St. Peter allude to the "sufferings of Christ" in his general epistles, as if absolutely possessed with their one meaning and value. Twice, moreover, does he remind us that He suffered—"the just for the unjust," "bearing our sins in His own body on the tree," that "we being dead unto sins might live unto righteousness."

Christian reader, in inviting you to contemplate these sufferings, a blessed, yet a humbling Gospel for us, earnestly let us ask God to help us to remember that it is very holy ground. Any great sorrow for a heart with but a spark of humanity in it is a touching spectacle. But the sorrow of an innocent spirit suffering unjustly, and because of its innocence, is as elevating as it is rare. When it is also the sorrow of one who loves us, and suffers because he loves us, and in order that we may love him, there is no moral force

like it. But to behold the Incarnate Son of God in pain, suffering on behalf of His sinful creatures, that thereby they may become reconciled to His Father, is one of those mysteries which only the Word of God can reveal and the power of God apply.

Two thoughts on the subject may suffice us for the present. May the "Spirit of Christ" hallow them to our inmost souls.

THE Eastern Church, as *The nature of His sufferings.* some of us will remember, distinguishes the Lord's sufferings as known and unknown. It may be more definitely edifying for us if we consider them as bodily and spiritual. As to His bodily sufferings, those who feel it helpful to do so can study for themselves the most graphic account of the bodily woe of the Saviour that the pen of a scholar, the imagination of a poet, and the sympathy of a disciple has produced in our own time in Farrar's "Life of Christ." We may add that what Holy Scripture is so careful to indicate, both in the historical narratives of the evangelist and in the inspired anticipations of the prophets, must

have been deliberately intended for the edification of the Church.

Now, in His bodily suffering, *Bodily* there were at least these three *sufferings*. elements: shame, exhaustion, and thirst—each and all of them as actual to Him as they could be to us; nay, intensified, we may conjecture, by that remarkable sensitiveness to pain, which almost invariably accompanies a perfect and finely-strung organization. “They pierced my hands and my feet” [Ps. xxii. 16]. This evidently indicates the nailing of His blessed feet to the cross. “The song of the drunkards” [Ps. lxix. 12] is David’s own sentence. Here is the intimation of the profound shame and abasement which coarse insults inevitably cause to pure and noble souls, and which to Him, in what an inspired writer has called the “shame” [Heb. xii. 2], apparently, of the infamous cross, must have been a woe indeed. “They look and stare upon me” [Ps. xxii. 17] (a sentence from a Messianic psalm) is another sad moan from the heart that was breaking when the priests wagged their heads and the crowd spat their scorn. There was the awful exhaustion and the physical depres

sion accompanying it, which made Him reel and faint under the load of the cross before He was fastened to it, which afterwards found its mournful expression, once more in the words of the Psalmist, "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul"

[Ps. lxi. 9]. Once more, there was the thirst, the intolerable thirst that ever accompanied crucifixion, made a pretext for tantalizing insult. "They gave me gall also for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" [Ps. lxi. 21]

*The spiritual
suffering.*

But what were His spiritual sufferings? The suffering of conflict and of solitariness, an unspeakable loathing and dismay and agony at sin, brought closer to Him, laid more heavily on Him than ever an intense jealousy for the honour of God and sorrow for the guiltiness of man. You remember the conflict in the Garden between the human will, that just because of its humanness shrank instinctively and inevitably from the pain and burden in front; and the Divine will, that from all eternity had foreseen and chosen that hour. Well, that conflict—which had its first travail-pang when

the Greeks came to Him, and the hour of His Passion was striking—followed Him to His cross, and agonized in Him there.

Christian reader, have you ever known what it is to be in moral and spiritual conflict, and to be well-nigh torn asunder by it? If not, you have yet to come of age in your spiritual manhood. If you have, then you can form a faint notion of what that struggle must have been to Christ. There was His solitariness, which, all His life through, in the beautiful sociableness of His perfect Humanity, He ever instinctively avoided, which, even in the agony of the Garden, He tried to anticipate, and sorrowfully failed to prevent. It coldly settled on Him as He was dying, in all its chilly, gloomy darkness: men insulting, disciples fleeing, devils tempting, His Father hidden. A "desire of the life that is in man's favour" belonged to Christ, as a feature of His true Humanity, and that He suffered through missing it, seems plain from the words, "Reproach hath broken my heart" [Ps. lxi. 20]. Oh! I pray you observe that it is not greatness, but littleness, that can easily dispense with human love, and prefers to suf-

fer alone. The tenderest and noblest souls most desire sympathy, most keenly feel the lack of it when it is denied them. The scourge, the nails, the thirst—these passed like fleeting clouds over a great mountain's brow; but to be left alone, utterly alone, without voice from earth or smile from Heaven, brought from Him that sharp cry of unutterable desolateness that still rings in the conscience of the world.

Then there was a righteous jealousy for the honour and faithfulness of His Father, which must have rankled as a thorn in His tender soul. "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him, for He said, I am the Son of God" [Matt. xxvii. 43]. Well did the Lord know that His trust had not been misplaced; nay, that never had His Father regarded Him with a deeper and vaster love than at the moment when He was willingly suffering for the revelation of His Name and Holiness; that, as He had not wronged God, God had not wronged Him, and presently all would be made plain. Nevertheless, until all was made plain, there was a cloud of mystery hanging over the character of God, and His

eternal righteousness was at stake before the universe. The Son of God was suffering for the glory of God ; and, when sinners threw at Him that He was suffering because He was guilty, the Father held His peace.

But doubtless the deepest and most awful anguish of all—an anguish which it is utterly impossible for us to conceive, fathom, or describe, which, nevertheless, we may reverently approach and contemplate—is that which came to Him through the making fully plain to His spotless soul of the awful sinfulness of sin, with the unspeakable loathing and horror caused to Him thereby. The sin of the race—in all its extremest possibilities, in all its most frightful developments, culminated in the crime of the Cross. There and then the holy soul of Jesus met it, faced it, looked down into its loathsome depths, felt its polluted breath on His cheek, tasted to the dregs its unutterable shame and bitterness, bowed down before it, as its crushing burden weighed upon His spirit. To His Father He said, “Amen, O Lord, to Thy inviolable righteousness, which can by no means clear the guilty.” Over man—cursing, gambling, mock

ing, staring under the Cross—He yearned with infinite love and immense pity for his ruin and death. For was not He his head and kinsman, sharer of his nature, and actual partaker of his life, hating the sin and yet loving the sinner, bent on vindicating God, born for redeeming man? He was as the saint of whom it was written, “Rivers of waters run down my cheeks because they keep not Thy law” [Ps. cxix. 36]. Also like a parent of old, only with a grief that embraced the race, and with a conscience that confessed no share in it, and in a prayer instantly fulfilling itself in a far loftier sacrifice, His solemn death-cry went up to Heaven; not as David’s, in his self-accusing anguish, “Would to God that I had died for thee!” [1 Sam. xviii. 33]. He *had* died; but in the calmness of a completed purpose and an assured reward, “It is finished” [John xix. 30].

The cause of His sufferings. Here, coming to look into the cause of His sufferings, and to learn why His anguish was so great (oh, it is holy ground!), let us at once admit that, except on one hypothesis, it is a hopeless problem. Bodily pain, longer and even keener than His, thousands of human sufferers, and

for causes much less sublime, have endured with a triumphant calmness. Death, so far from being to every man the sad ghost of an intolerable farewell, has often been a welcome guest, sometimes an invited deliverer. Pagan history is full of acts of heroic sacrifice, of lives readily surrendered for love of home and country, of martyrdom grandly endured as a true reward for the confession of moral truth. Whence, then, is it that our Pattern and Deliverer faints and reels under a burden which others have borne with a kind of sublime gladness; that, when the hour had come for the accomplishment of a redemption conceived in a past eternity, even the thought should have occurred to Him that the load was too heavy to be borne. The key to the difficulty, so far as there is a key to it, is to be found partly in the nature of His purpose, partly in the mystery of His person.

With all variety of expression, yet each expression a distinct, though consistent aspect of one harmonious and profound verity, the Bible opens to us the purpose of His sorrow. It was to "redeem us from all iniquity" by "the blood of His Cross" [Titus II, 14] to "make

peace " [Col. i. 20]. He was also declared by the Baptist to be "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world " [John i. 29]. Of this also St. Paul wrote, that He was "made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him " [2 Cor. v. 21]; all which statement (and it is needless to multiply these statements), containing as they do what is commonly understood as the doctrine of the Atonement, marrow and essence of the Gospel, practically mean and declare that the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Head and Representative, did, in our stead and place, for us with God fully recognize and satisfy the Divine Righteousness, and made homage to the violated dignity of His immutable and eternal law; and took upon Himself and endured, in all their unspeakable meaning, our sins; confessing (not, indeed, as one who had actually sinned them, but as absolutely identified with the race which had sinned) their guiltiness before His Father; mourning over them with all the holy and profound sadness which a sinless and true soul could possibly feel for those belonging to it and unspeakably dear. This being so, can you wonder that, when

“the iniquity of us all,” in the prophet’s solemn language, was actually “laid upon Him” [Isaiah liii. 6], He reeled and shuddered, as if some deadly blow had been aimed at His heart? Had His sorrow been only that of a martyr, we might have expected a glad *Jubilate* that He was permitted to suffer. The Sin-bearer, with the world’s sin on His innocent spirit, could not but mourn and suffer till the cup was exhausted and the expiation complete.

BUT the greatness of His suffering has yet more *The mystery of His Person.* light thrown on it by contemplating the mystery of His Person. He was God and man in one Person. In Him the Divine and human natures, in their absolute and separate perfection, were united forevermore. Thus it was that, so far as we can presume to put it into words, two currents of feeling flowed through His spirit and two centres of sympathy claimed and engrossed His personal consciousness. God, He was all for and with God. Man, He was all for and with man. God for man, and yet, when he sinned,

against his sin; man, made by God, and responsible to Him, and belonging to Him, and rejoicing in Him, yet, in virtue of His manhood, knitted to a race dead in trespasses and sins. Carefully consider how this twofold nature of His may have compelled and also intensified His conflict. As God, whatever God's righteousness demanded, He too demanded. Whatever stirred God's holy displeasure, stirred His displeasure. God's feeling about sin was also His feeling about it. The utter impossibility for God, as a moral governor, to connive at sin as if it did not matter, or to treat sinners as if they had not really grieved Him, for Him was an impossibility too. Therefore, when the Lord "laid on Him the iniquity of us all," and "bruised Him" for them (whatever the Prophet's awful expression may exactly mean), who was to say No to that expression of His Father's righteousness? With all His heart and strength His parched lips moaned out a true Amen to each throb of His passion; all through it He was on His Holy Father's side, in love testifying for righteousness. Yet He was on man's side too, not through indifference to his sin,

but in spite of it; not that sin was not sinful, but because its misery was so great. As His infinite love to His Father and His partaking of the Divine nature made Him accept in meek submission all that was involved in a world's sin-bearing, so His infinite love to men not only made Him long to deliver them, but just because He so tenderly loved them, His pain at their sin was so great.

Some of you will understand this by yourselves, for it is a law of our nature. The faults and sins of strangers take comparatively little hold of us, not indeed half the hold they ought. But when a child or a friend sins, in exact proportion to our love will ever be our sorrow. Nay, in a sort of way we almost feel to have done the sin ourselves, when it comes close home to us, through our affinity with the sinner. Thus (to repeat the idea) it was Christ's sympathy with His righteous Father on the one hand, and His tender love to His brother man on the other, that, through the intenseness of the actings of the twofold nature, made His burden so heavy and His anguish so great. As God hates sin, He hated it. As God would

prevent sin, and in His very love must recognize and condemn it, so would He recognize, prevent, and condemn it too.

But as man can suffer and weep so He suffered and wept, until the stillness came, when the conflict was over and the propitiation complete. Then He fell asleep, and it was finished.

*What is that
Cross to us?*

Reader, let me ask you what moral response does your inward conscience make to that great suffering of Christ? He gave Himself for you. Consider what that means. It is not likely that He should have done so, had there not been a cause. What the cause was, in the only explanation that will hold good for a moment, is the world's sin. But the world means you and me. Did Christ really suffer for us? To say No, shuts us out from hope and life, *for, so far as we know*, there is no hope, no life for us, but through that death upon the cross and the Resurrection out of it afterwards. To say Yes, instantly involves the inquiry, to what extent we permit it to affect us, either in repentance for the sin which He bore or in gratitude to Him for having consented to

bear it? Oh, what is this Cross to us, who must one day look on Him whom we have pierced? Have we taken our sins to it, and left them there? Have we sought peace under its shadow, got it, and kept it? Is that sorrow made our sorrow, because we spiritually understand it and personally assent to it, using it to purge our conscience and transform our life? In a word, have we accepted from Him this redemption, and given Him in exchange our hearts? For, in a most real sense, He still suffers, though in glory, through the wounds wherewith sinners daily wound Him. Every sin of man has in it a tendency to send Him to a second cross; and to neglect or despise this salvation is to repeat the shout of the multitude, "Not this man, but Barabbas."

As for those that stand by His cross, and see Him die, and confess that He died for them, and do not care for it, shall I tell you the sentence that will ring in their hearts through the coming time? "Suffered first under Pontius Pilate, crucified again by me."

So, when we approach His Cross, let all who need Him and love Him try to be in

sympathy with His sorrow and in fellowship with His death. The contemplation of the Cross should be in a most real way a blessed means of grace.

It is what St. Paul, quite at the close of his life, felt he had far more fully to learn; and it is the only road that can lead us on to the power of His Resurrection.

Jesus suffering for me—let it be translated for each of us into our suffering with Jesus, in the taking of His yoke, and in the apprehension of His sacrifice. Then all of us, each in our own measure, shall learn from His Cross how to welcome our own, and meekly carry it after Him. Then the Cross shall become not only peace and light, but strength and food. For there, more than anywhere else, can He consent to fulfil His word to us, “He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me, and I in him” [John vi. 56].

This, then, is the first half of the Gospel—what Christ has done and suffered for me. Let us now look at the other half, what we are to do and to suffer for Christ.

For the love of the Atonement essentially contains in it the true law of the highest life

of man. St. Peter bears witness to this when he writes, "Who suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps" [1 Peter ii. 21]. Let us thankfully learn that every act of humble and willing sacrifice, every taunt or jeer meekly borne for righteousness' sake, in memory of Him, "Who when He suffered threatened not" [1 Peter ii. 23], every sharp though secret grief endured with cheerful courage, the postponing of personal happiness to public good, a young and buoyant life uncomplainingly and continuously given to the monotonous service of a morose kinsman, hope deferred for duty's sake till the heart is sick with waiting and the bloom of life passed, talents buried through the force of circumstances till it is too late to use them; here is the practical reproduction and continuation of the principle of the Atonement in its central idea of willing sacrifice; in these we share the death of Christ, "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our body" [2 Cor. iv. 10].

In other words, it is the self-life nailed to the Cross of Christ. "I am crucified with Christ."

Two points in the exposition of this sentence must at the outset be claimed. One that here, as elsewhere, the Apostle writes of himself as the typical Christian man who, in his own condition of privilege and conflict, formally represents the family of God. Thus "I" means "we." The other, of course, springing out of it, that this is no mere Pauline idea of holiness, which one caught up into the third Heaven might in his best moments look up at, and try to live by, for the bulk of Christians higher than the stars; but that most truly it touches us all, in the fact it represents, and the discipline it indicates, and the fellowship it ensures. "I," the

The self-life. self-life, the *ego* in every man, the root and soil of all possibilities of sin. "Am crucified"—the lingering, painful death of the flesh, the Adam nature, ever in contention with, yet never in this life entirely expelled by, the imparted nature of God. "With Christ"—that is, in absorbing the virtue of His atonement, learning the fellowship of His sufferings, and practising the secret of His life.

Now, this self-life, in the unavoidableness

of its existence, in the reasonableness of its liberty, in the persuasiveness of its influence, in the subtlety of its fascination, in the plausibleness of its excuses, and in the deadliness of its triumph, is inevitably bound up with the spiritual history of every man, fitting him more closely than the poisoned garment in the Greek fable, and as an angel of light whispering its flatteries into the soul. For, of course, it has plenty to say for itself. If we did not each of us distinctly recognize our personality, and study our own welfare, society would presently fall back into a barbarous communism, in which savagery would feed on helplessness, and the law of general development now operating through individual effort, in ceasing to be a practical force, would paralyze the onward movement of the world. Moreover, who shall say that He who has made this earth so fair, and man His highest creature on it still capable of so much pure felicity, really frowns on us when we gratefully drink the odour of the flowers and bathe our hands in the sparkling sunlight? Is He likely so to contradict His own creative wisdom as to justify the cynicism that happiness

is the fountain of sin? Nature's analogies, at any rate, point quite the other way. Yet, making the most of this plea, and careful to avoid, with a large and charitable judgment, any sour forbidding of sweet human joy, we cannot help seeing that the ways of God, and the tale of the accumulating ages, and the sombre experience, of a well-examined heart, all say—"You are free; be free. But take care. He that loveth his life shall lose it." For, indeed, out of this very self-life among the bowers of Paradise came that "insignificant" sin that corrupted the race. From that same self-life, whether in the ultimate development of crimes that shock the conscience of humanity, or in the stealthy habit of a soft self-pleasing that first enervates, and presently benumbs us, springs that nest of reptile sins, which, growing and feeding in the dark, suddenly raise their hissing crests to startle and shock us, compelling from Him, whose first desire is to make us partakers of His Holiness, the searching discipline of His love.

In the sweet repose of home, in the steady routine of duty, in the permitted freedom of natural enjoyment, in the dignity of serious

study, nay, in the very offices of religion, and in the form of worship, whether meagre or stately, self, with its specious blandishments, may creep in, and while expecting indulgence, may stir the jealousy of God. From this self-life, who among us, conscious of God searching Him, can dare to pronounce himself free?

The remedy against it the Apostle proceeds to indicate under the terrible figure of crucifixion. "I am crucified." Now, without dispute, this expression is fairly susceptible of each, at least, three interpretations, each in harmony with, and the complement of, the other. Literally, of course, the words are, "I have been crucified with Christ." When Christ my Head and Representative was crucified, I, as one of His members, and through the grace of His incarnation and my spiritual union with Him, identified with Him before the Father, was crucified too. His cross was my cross. His death was my death. "If one died, then all died" [2 Cor. v. 14], my fellows, and I among them. But if we have been "planted together in the likeness of His death," we shall be planted also "in the likeness of His resurrection" [Rom. vi. 5]. This is evident, since


the doctrine it declares is that through death comes life. As the Cross to Jesus was the way to triumph and glory, so the Cross to His Church means regeneration and life. "If we be dead with Christ we shall also live with Him" [Rom. vi. 5]. Strange it is, yet true, that he who is born of God, and in whom God's seed remains, died that he might be born—was born because he had died. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live." Yet this fact and this doctrine are hardly the most direct lessons that the figure seems intended to convey. What St. Paul then was thinking of was the present and the future. So, when he wrote the words, he indicated an inevitable discipline, he imposed a perpetual law. The discipline is the Cross, the law is self-denial.

Christian reader, do not judge me to be pushing a mere figure into a rhetorical extravagance if I dare to suggest that the Christian is being crucified now. Indeed, it is no strained mysticism, but a most solemn verity, which the sooner we face and master, the better it will be for us. That while in our regenerate nature we dwell with our Lord from Heaven in the heavenly places, abiding in

His Body, in the flesh—that is, our old corrupt nature, we are on the Cross, and must remain there till we die. “They that are Christ’s,” says the same Apostle in the same epistle, “have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” [Gal. v. 24]. By all means ask, what does this mean? Simply this. That so long as the flesh remains, and our corrupt affections war and lust in our members, for us to come down from the Cross (in other words, to be spared the Divine discipline) might be to give up the battle for goodness, and to go back to our sins. Another way of putting it, perhaps a better way, is that the Cross on which our Lord did hang that He might expiate our sins, is the Cross on which we too must hang, that we may crucify and subdue them. The Cross, with every feature of it. The thorns must press our brow, that we may bring every thought into captivity to Him and to His Purpose. The nails must be in our hands and feet, the organs of our constant activities, that they may be used only according to His will; nay, if so He chooses, not to be used at all. The spear-thrust may have to pierce our heart.

For sometimes, even in our holiest and dearest affections, He deliberately, though always with indescribable tenderness, wounds us, that we may flee unto Him to hide us, and adore Him more fervently than ever, with the pure love of greatly chastened souls. Occasionally He visits us with an awful loneliness; a sense of utter isolation; a sad and pitiful mournfulness creeping over the spirit, like the doleful garment of a winter's night, to compel us to seek Him, who alone in all the world perfectly understands us, and will cover our head in the day of battle. After all, this is only the reverse side of what the Lord once said Himself: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me" [Matt. xvi. 24]. It is the same thing. If we are to have the cross in some real fashion, does it much matter whether we are on the Cross or the Cross on us; it borne on our back or we nailed to it? God forbid that we should preach a gospel of asceticism. God also forbid that we should shrink from a gospel of holiness. But holiness can come to us only through a Divine education of our spirits, conveyed and inter-

preted and blessed to us usually through circumstances, by His own grace.

NCE more, the context *Law of personal Life.* makes it plain that there is a law of the personal life which the Apostle would here impose on the Church to which he was writing, and to which he had been careful to submit himself in his own life. Not only was he, through his condition of spiritual union with Christ, dead unto sin, as to its dominion over him, and his own lusting after it; he was also dead to the law as his method of being justified before God. Observe this Gospel. In every single feature of God's scheme of salvation, whether from the guilt of sin or from the power of it, self is to be destroyed, that grace may be pre-eminent; man is to be nothing, that God may be supreme. So even to the law was he crucified, whether as a means of acceptance or as a ground of boasting, that he might cleave with his whole being to God, who *gave* him everything that he possessed. Here, again, is the great law of our life laid down by Christ in those tremendous words, "If any man come

to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" [Luke xiv. 26]. This is the law which is to dominate every sphere of our existence, which claims tribute-money from every talent and possession, which declines to abdicate its authority even over the counsels of our perfection, refuses to let go its hold of us even in the house of God. In some things it means a quiet watchfulness, in others a manly self-restraint ; here an equipoise of surrender—there, even a stern questioning as to the habits of our life. Is thy home filled, happy, and serene? Sometimes whisper to thyself, not querulously, but thoughtfully, "It is mine, and it is meant to be mine, God's kind gift to me. Let it be mine so long as it pleases Him. Yet I must not quite forget, here is not my rest." Hast thou wealth? Do not fear it, for God made Abram rich. Do not lean on it, for He made Job poor. In the enjoyment and use of the good things of God, by all means enjoy and expect the favour of Him whose first manifestation of His Father was in multiplying wine at a peasant's bridal.

Yet if His Apostle would not have eaten meat while the world standeth lest he should make his brother to offend and so imperil his soul [1 Cor. viii. 13], He who died for the world—well, you know what He would wish of you, if by some sacrifice, whether of palate or social exhilaration, you could win back a soul to virtue. “Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving.” So writes an apostle. Yet, if liberty is good, charity is better. “So speak ye and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty” [James ii 1, 2]. May God in His mercy give us, when we murmur at the greatness of our petty sacrifices, first to look up at His Son’s Cross, and then back at the days when, for His dear sake, gentle women faced the lions, and boys went bravely to die, and the cruel flames licked faces that were radiant with the ecstasy of martyrdom; and perhaps, worst of all, children suffered before the very eyes of their parents, still constant to Christ.

The lines that follow will prove a better sermon than mine. They are a poet’s gospel.

"I was born sickly, poor, and mean,
 A slave ; no misery could screen
 The holders of the pearl of price
 From Cæsar's envy ; therefore twice
 I fought with beasts, and three times saw
 My children suffer by his law.
 At last my own release was earned ;
 I was some time in being burned,
 But, at the close, a hand came through
 The fire above my head, and drew
 My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
 Sergius, a brother, writes for me
 This testimony on the wall—
 For me, I have forgot it all."

—ROBERT BROWNING.

*All this with
 Christ.*

But all this is "with Christ."
 Christ, whose blood has pro-
 cured our peace, whose presence can fill our
 loneliness, whose example is the illumination
 of our life, whose fellowship is the dignity of
 our labour, whose image is the end of our
 faith, whose welcome is the hope of our re-
 ward. For He on His Cross suffering and dy-
 ing for us, thereby once and for all made our
 peace with God ; and this cross of ours is not
 to make atonement for the sin, which He put
 away by the sacrifice of Himself, completely
 and forever. Rather it is to help us to dis-

cern and abhor and subdue it, just because it has been put away; with His mind and will about it, "resisting unto blood" [Heb. xii. 4]. Oh, let us try to believe that He is with us there, bidding us not to fear, nor to think ourselves forgotten. Tenderly and sadly He watches us in our pain, while far too strong of purpose to take us down from it, till His purpose about us is done. His own example illuminates us, for the restraining and subduing of the innocent self-life is wonderfully manifest in Him, from the moment that He went down to Nazareth and was subject unto His parents, until the moment when He commended His spirit into His Heavenly Father's hands. In the Temptation, He steadily refused the reasonable assuagement of His bodily necessities. In His ministry, He put away all commendation from others—"Why callest thou me good?"—ever referring to His Father, His words of truth, His deeds of power, His purpose of life. In His agony He murmured, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" [John xviii. 11]. He drank it. In His prayer in the supper-chamber it was the repose of His heart that He had

sought His Father's glory, not His own. [John xvii. 4]. And His image is the end of our faith, for what we desire, or at least profess to desire, is to be like Him, and the methods and helps for becoming more like Him, we must each in the light of our own conscience, and the exercise of our own judgment, choose and practise for ourselves. Yet let us be careful to remember that honest faith about them as ordained by God and suitable for us, is the only secret of their helping our sanctification; that not grace inherent in them, but grace conveyed through them, can edify us into God.

THREE last thoughts over *Final reflections.*
 a subject of almost inex-
 haustible fulness and also of profound humiliation, on matters that may help some one who honestly wishes to make sacrifices for Christ to discover the secret. First, let us be sure of this, that no life deserving the name of Christian can ever exist, without the law and habit of sacrifice, in some degree at least, colouring and dominating it. Also, that the secret of its freedom and progress, its continu-

ousness and expansion, its beauty and its influence, will be, must be, in exact proportion to the sincerity of our struggle with self. Whether to help the Church's triumph, or our own holiness, we must fight selfishness.

"It is the profoundest of all moral truths, that a man who would work out his salvation must cast out self, though he rend his heart-strings in doing it. Not love of self-indulgence only, but self-applause, self-confidence, self-conceit and vanity, desire and expectation of reward ; self in all the subtle ingenuities with which it winds about the soul." *

Then, the only way to be capable of lofty sacrifices is first to begin with humble ones. The doing of the little duties at our own house-door, the love of our neighbour, perhaps uninteresting and a little stupid, are the first steps in the ladder of goodness, at the top of which sparkles the martyr's crown. For there are martyrs now who live out their quiet years, die in their beds, wear every-day clothes, enjoy homely worship, yet lay their lives at their Heavenly Master's feet as fully

* J. A. Froude.

and as acceptably as either Ignatius or Ridley. It is the habit of making sacrifices in small things that enables us for making them in great, *when it is asked of us*. Temper, love of pre-eminence, bodily indulgence, the quick retort, the sharp irony—in checking these let us find our cross and carry it. Or, when the moment comes for some really great service, the heart will be petrified for it, and the blinded eyes will not see the occasion of love.

But the hardest question is the last. We admit, of course, the need of sacrifice; recognize its nobleness, bow to its necessity. But we cannot admit its easiness, nor discover its joy.

Whose fault is this? Not Christ's. It is our own. If we would only learn to trust Him, dare to yield to Him, ask to love Him, then He would make His service perfect freedom; then His yoke would be easy and His burden light.

For we need not wait till we reach the sinless land, and the perfect liberty of the children of God, for the joy of a discovered Saviour.

This pen is not worthy to write it. yet what

it writes is true—He Himself is the substance of our reward to the souls that wait for Him, and do they need a better? Oh, that this heart of mine were but able to explain, to persuade you what Christ has for those who love Him; how He can flood the soul that is emptied of human delights for His sake with brimming rivers of grace! Life and liberty, joy and power come in return for this sacrifice of self, for this patient hanging on the cross of self-denial. LIFE, more and more abundantly, and in exact proportion to the death of the will to sin. LIBERTY, in running the way of His commandments, because He has enlarged our hearts [Ps. cxix. 3]. Oh, be sure that Self it is, and nothing but self, that makes His commandments grievous. When once we resist self, really resist it, we find a burden gone. JOY, the joy of God, which He means for us and offers to us, if only we knew it. Why are we so suspicious of joy—looking askance at it as if it were some heated excitement or rash presumption, when even an Old Testament prophet could say to the Hebrews under the first covenant, “The joy of the Lord is your strength” [Neh. viii. 10]; when

an Apostle (full of humility), waiting for his martyrdom, wrote as with his dying pen, and from the place of his dismal captivity, to press it as a duty on the Church? A dying saint of our own time was heard to exclaim, "Joy, joy, I shall see my Lord to-night!" Why should this seem, as to some it certainly would seem, the cry of a hysterical religion? That such a reproach is possible, only shows us how far we may be from the gladness of the primitive times. If Christ were felt to be our dearest Friend, and we ever tried to make Him so, going to depart to be with Him, would be felt to be far better; and simple faith in His gracious promises and finished redemption would rob death of its sting and conscience of its reproaches. Yet we need not be dying, nor wait till we die, to catch the spirit of joy even now. Natures differ, and we must not try to fit ourselves into other moulds, or we shall suffer for our unreality. Yet, for the soul that counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, joy should run over.

Also POWER. We can all complain how weak we are; and complaining of weakness

which we might prevent and remedy, if we pleased, is a poor kind of humility. No doubt it is better to complain of it than to be content with it. Yet the loftiest saint who ever lived, who called himself the chief of sinners, because he honestly felt he was, scrupled not to say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" [Phil. iv. 13].

The more we surrender for Christ, the more we get back from Him. The emptier the soul is of self, so much the more room for Him to possess and gladden it with His divine fulness. All will at least be stones in the glorified temple; but some will be pillars. Shall we? Not for personal ambition, but that the Son of God may be glorified thereby. "To him that overcometh, will I give to be a pillar in the temple of my God, and I will write upon him my new name" [Rev. iii. 12].

VI.

GLORY.

"I BESEECH THEE, SHOW ME THY GLORY."

*"Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy
Him for ever."*



WHAT glory? For Moses, of course, the glory of the Divine character. The Divine answer to that prayer was, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee" [Exod. xxxiii. 19]. For us who are in the last time it is the glory of the Word made flesh. A new glory, because the glory of His risen humanity; an endless glory, never to cease; nay, let us be bold and say, never even to cease augmenting and growing till the end shall come. You ask why? Remember St. Peter's words: "The sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" [1 Pet. i. 1]. Clearly

understand that the glory of the Resurrection was to come, not only after the Passion in order of time, but after it as part of its exceeding great reward. "Who raised Him from the dead" [1 Pet. i. 21], and gave Him glory, writes the same Apostle later on in the chapter. And it is plain from Scripture that this glory was not only the misty vision of enraptured prophets, but the sustaining and ever-present anticipation of the suffering Christ. For hope was no stranger to the human heart of Jesus. Of man, in a real sense, it is said, "We are saved by hope" [Rom. viii. 24]. But even, in Him, too, may we not say with perfect and holy reverence, it was an anchor of the soul keeping it from drifting before the storm, telling Him that the darkness was passing and the dawn at hand? We observe this in His words both before He suffered, and after He suffered; also in the words of the Holy Ghost, when His glory had become all His own. To the Apostles: "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him" [John xiii. 31, 32]. In

the sacerdotal prayer to His own Holy Father: "And now, O Father, glorify Thou me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" [John xvij. 5]. After He had risen, to His disciples on the way to Emmaus: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" [Luke xxiv. 26], as something He expected. Once more, we read in the Hebrews: "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the Throne of God" [Heb. xii. 2]. I propose that on the nature of this glory we should meditate now; if the last, almost the most wonderful feature of the Gospel, profoundly conscious that the glory

The nature of of Christ, and the glory into
this glory. which His Church shall one day be transfigured, when she sees Him as He is, as much passeth our entire comprehension as His Love doth; yet that if and because it is to be ours, when we sit with Him on the Throne, He will not be displeased with us, if we try to think about it before we reach it.

The glory of Christ is the manifestation of His Sonship; and it is first of all seen in

His accomplished purpose—"The riches of the glory of the mystery" [Col. i. 27] blessedly conceived in the Divine heart before the worlds were made, and slowly elaborated as the ages went on in the unspeakable patience of God. "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" [Luke xii. 50]. This to His disciples. Just before He suffered, His word of praise was this: "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do" [John xvii. 4]. This to His Father. Immediately before He expired, He said: "It is finished" [John xix. 30]. This ended all. Not till then could He die. That eternal purpose was God and man made one—in Him. "When He had by Himself purged our sins" [Heb. i. 3]; and again, "having offered one sacrifice for sins" [Heb. x. 12]; and again, "having obtained eternal redemption for us." These are the several faces or aspects of that atoning work which the Love of the Eternal Three accomplished in the Incarnation. And the glory of this! One soul saved, what a mystery of pity, and forbearance, and wisdom, and power, which only He who put them forth

can understand. But a race redeemed, and a Church decked in the life and righteousness of God—we must be in Heaven before we can guess what it means.

Then there is the glory of the Father's welcome: "Now come I to Thee" [John xvii. 13]. "The love wherewith Thou hast loved me" [John xvii. 26]. Here were the thoughts that made summer in His soul as He met His dying. "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" [Matt. xvii. 5]. Here is the Divine complacency and joy wherewith from first to last the Father beheld Him. "I do always such things that please Him" [John viii. 29] was the calm account of His life that smote conviction into the Jews. It were useless, if not presumptuous, for us to inquire which of two motives more constrained Him to His Cross—love to God or love to man. This, however, is plain, that God He infinitely loved, being in indissoluble union and sympathy with Him before the worlds were made; and oh, what a blessed welcome, what an august reception, what a tender recognition (to speak of Divine things in human language); what a pomp of principalities and powers must have

been marshalled to meet Him, when He passed through the Heavens, and sat down for ever at the right hand of God, "being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" [Heb. i. 4]. But this is holy ground, and we must not further tread on it.

In the third place, it was the glory of a crowned humanity. At His conception actually, at His birth visibly, He took the manhood into union with God. After His Resurrection He took the manhood so united to be crowned with glory and honour in Heaven. Gratefully, as we bow before the Cross, humbly and devoutly as we say, was ever sorrow like that sorrow, or love like that love, had there been only a Cross and a grave, with no crowning after the Cross, no rising out of the grave, the world would still be in its sins and Death king. But hear St. Paul's gospel: "It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" [Rom. viii. 34]. That is a gospel. When Christ died man was redeemed, and when He rose man was justified, and when He ascended man

was crowned. The last of all God's works, he is immeasurably the noblest. Never despair of him, and never despise him. Made in God's image, and for fellowship with Him, even in his fall and ruin, he is wonderful and lovely. But in his Resurrection how blessed, in his regeneration how sublime! With the physical symmetry and fairness of his outer form, with his reason and intelligence, his kingly will, his judicial conscience, and his affectionate heart, any man or woman you find, even though soiled with the worst soils of moral pollution, is a wonderful work of God. But when perfect instead of fallen, immortal, with the last enemy, Death, behind; pure with the purity of God, wise with His truth, penetrated by His love, vital with His grace, and inspired with His purpose, what kings and queens will the ransomed of the Lord hereafter become, sitting on their thrones of power in the Kingdom of the Father! Christ then, indeed, will be King of kings and Lord of lords; and we, if we are worthy of admission there, shall be kings and lords under Him, each with our sphere of power, and our function of duty, and our keys of government, and

our raiment of light; the proportions of our life complete, the symmetry of our duty, charity, worship perfect, our length and breadth and height equal.

As His Resurrection is our resurrection—for “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” [1 Cor. xv. 22]—observe the “all”—so is His Coronation the pledge of ours. We do not yet comprehend all that we shall be, for we cannot now see what He will be. This we do know, that those whom He has washed from their sins in His blood, He hath made kings and priests unto God and His Father; and the fancy reels before the amazing conception of the noble tasks, the continuous testimony, the grand vice-royalty, the expanding power, that it may please Him who is at once our Head and our Master, our God and our King, to bestow on the ransomed race in everlasting spousal union with Himself, through all the coming ages, perhaps for all the universe of worlds.

“To him that overcometh will I give to sit with me in my throne; even as I overcame, and am set down with my Father on His throne” [Rev. iii. 21]. This is a great mystery, and with a profound meaning.

Again, it is the glory of His mediatorial office. He died that salvation might be possible. He rose that it might be actual. What His Cross procured, His Resurrection confirms. It is still true of Him—"The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost" [Luke xix. 10]. He is still Saviour. He is still Son of Man. Never will He lose or deny that name by which on earth He seems to have loved best to call Himself—that name which is our true link with Him, now that He is reigning in Heaven. He is still seeking, still saving the lost; and if it seems that more are lost than ever there were, for the earth must be fuller through this eighteen hundred years, may we not still more truly say, there are more found? Jesus lives, and we know it, when He lives in our heart. Jesus saves, and we know it, not only because it may have pleased Him to save us, but when it pleases Him to use us for saving others. Jesus pleads, and we know it, for the Comforter is come to us from the Father, making the Gospel potent, and conscience restless, and sin a bondage, and pity keen, and prayer mighty, and the Bible precious, and the world startled,

and the Church awake. If it was glory for Jesus to die, it was glory for Him to rise. If it pleased Him to suffer, it was that He might be mighty to save; and as every ransomed soul passes up out of its conflicts and sorrows into the presence of the Incarnate King, He sees of "the travail of His soul and is satisfied" [Isaiah liii. 11]. Yet it is the manifested glory of one who is the Light of the World. This He claimed for Himself when on earth; and we can hardly wonder that so lofty an assertion should have provoked an indignant surprise. Yet it is what St. Paul also claimed for Him, when He stood before Festus, "that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles" [Acts xxvi. 23]. And has He not since justified that assertion by the matchless influence of His Name? False prophet or true, Son of God, or only son of Mary, a blasphemer or speaking the words of truth and soberness; now reigning King in Heaven, or but a handful of dust in a Syrian grave; by the confession of His enemies, to whom in spite of themselves He is an object of absorb-

ing interest; with the acclamation of the disciples to whom the instant and entire recognition of all His claims is the only explanation of His life that satisfies their reason: the only outcome of His death that stills their heart, Christ is any way pre-eminent. Wisely or foolishly, rightly or wrongly, He is the centre of human attraction; the fountain of perfect morality; the character which, in itself complete, meets all possible demands of the human conscience; the Friend who attracts the secret sympathies of rich and poor, young and old; the Prophet who has raised the world, bad as it is, to a higher level than it had ever dreamed of without Him; the Saviour, who from some that read these lines has earned a gratitude that no eternity can exhaust. But it is His Resurrection and Ascension that have made Him this. He is light to the angels in Heaven, to mankind on earth, to the spirits in Hades, to the devils in hell. To the angels in Heaven, who through the Church, now discern in Him, as they could not before discern, the manifold wisdom of God. To mankind upon earth, which in beholding Him behold the Father in righteous-

ness, mercy, and truth. To the spirits in Hades, to some of whom once, when He tasted death for all men, He Himself preached His own Gospel, be sure not in vain. To devils in hell, to whom the Resurrection was the utter foiling and baffling of the mystery of evil, when most it expected to triumph by forcing on the Death of the Cross. "Having spoiled principalities and powers He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" [Col. ii. 15].

But about this glory the Lord besought His Father, on behalf of His Apostles, that they might behold it [John xvii. 24], even then; having said just before, that He had already given it to them: "And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" [John xvii. 22].

This glory for us is our manifested Sonship; partly visible now, to be perfectly revealed in the life to come.

There are four degrees or steps in Sonship. There is the Sonship of original creation, and of baptismal privilege, and of conscious union, and of glorified life. Of the first, the prophet Malachi writes: "Have we not all one Father?"

hath not one God created us?" [Mal. ii. 10]. We read—Of the second, "Baptizing them in (into) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" [Matt. xxviii. 19]. The children have the Father's name. Of the third St. John writes: "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even unto them that believe on His name" [John i. 12]. Sonship realized. Of the fourth, we read in the Revelation: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" [Rev. xxi. 8].

This Sonship, or Glory, is simply Christ's image, and relationship to God, and work for man, so far as the possibilities of things permit, reproduced in and continued by us, through our union with Him, and by the grace of the Holy Ghost.

We, too, as the sons of God, have to finish the work given us to do, and by the power of our continual intercession to do for men what they will not do for themselves, plead on their behalf with God. We, too, have to fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in the flesh for His body's sake, the Church

we, too, by our goodness, are to be salt and light to the world.

In an earlier chapter (ii.) the thought was pressed of the need of individuality, both as a help to us to discover the work given us to do, and also to enable us to do it. It has not only to be discovered and commenced, but to be finished, with as little incompleteness as may be, though I suppose no one, except One, has ever yet done all the good works which God before ordained that he should walk in, with as few mistakes as may be, though the art of avoiding blunders is usually learned only when the opportunity of making them is over, with as little reluctance as may be.

For who of us does not know the humbling necessity of having almost to flog his will into even a tolerable diligence, with self postponed to the one supreme object of glorifying God.

Not to waste time, and also to learn, without making life fretful to ourselves, and intolerable to others, how to husband and use its tiniest fragments; to appreciate opportunities, which are really the critical moments of usefulness, and which float the labouring ship

on the crest of the wave ; to have a deep, and growing, and wonderful appreciation of the vast results of the quickly passing moments on the coming eternity, as if each act and word was a seed-germ of incalculable importance for the great spaces in front ; to learn the way of constantly appreciating the value of our individual conduct on those with whom we are thrown : in a word, to have tenacity without obstinateness, concentration without deformity, elasticity without suppleness, self-knowledge without egotism ; here is the secret of getting done before we go part at least of the task we started with, when our serious life began ; here, too, the keeping hold of that continuity of life and plan, which makes even the humblest life a kind of epic with the angels in Heaven. Oh, how much is wasted and poorly done, and therefore unrewarded, through desultoriness of nature, and levity of purpose, and a sort of slipshod way of shuffling through life, with shoes down at the heels and the nerve-strings of our mind and will loose and dangling. Not so may Christians fill their niche in the temple of glorified souls and leave their mark on men. Let each of us

ask ourselves, What can I do best; what is it that I am attempting to do; is it being done; how? We have, each of us, stages in our life, with duties, trials, opportunities, lessons peculiar to it. We cannot go back to pick up anything dropped in the stage behind; each period has its own task and its own discipline, and we have nothing to spare either for the past or the future. We live only in the present; let us fill it with grave, diligent, thoughtful activities. The past is out of our reach; the future is unknown. Let us remember, further, that it is not only in the discharge of external activities with others that our given task is to be done; there is an inward task upon ourselves. I mean the task of self-discipline. We read of holiness by faith, and truly there is no holiness without faith. Yet this is only one-half of the truth. Holiness must come also by effort, and watchfulness, and contemplation, and deep desire, and self-restraint, and the use of those divinely appointed channels through which grace flows into the soul. The older I grow the more convinced I become, that much of the imperfect, and inconsistent, and ill-de-

veloped, and one-sided goodness we observe in modern types of the religious life, springs from our not sufficiently remembering that we are at the best sick men, who need careful regimen, prudent restraints, sometimes crutches, often medicine. It is possible that rules may fret us as inconsistent both with the theory and enjoyment of our Christian freedom; yet they are often needful to educate us for liberty, as well as to help us in it; and that more soberness mingled with our joyous sense of pardon, more regulating power in the grateful acceptance of God's bountiful goodness, would at once steady our action, and mature as well as stimulate our growth. Many and many a gray-headed Christian is but a child after all in spiritual life and culture, and has no right to the privileges of manhood, if ripeness is not in years, but in character. If he chooses to take them no one can prevent him, but he suffers from it, and the Church too. Mr. Phillips Brooks, in one of the most suggestive of his sermons, has explained the value of Lenten observance, in one of its features—fasting—to be twofold: that it expresses repentance, and uncovers the

life to God. Some of us are startled even at the word, as if it was a Roman austerity, which the spirit of the Gospel has exiled from the culture of the soul. It is certain that a great many really Christian people would be far happier and holier if they were more circumspect and intelligent than they are in regulating their habits of speech and food, their hours of retirement and devotion. Cannot you divine, by a sort of instinct, those who steadily aim at bringing all their common life into regular captivity to the law of Christ, often at the expense of their personal gratification, but ever with the result of grace for themselves and influence for others? On no souls does so much precious fragrance hang like the glistening dew; from no characters does so much hidden virtue go forth to heal, as from those who walk closely with God in a hidden life of secret devotion and self-government; who really, longing after His likeness, are at the pains to strive after it, as well as to wish for it. So let us not be content with a low standard, with the faults of twenty years ago still corroding the soul, with the feeble, and also insincere, wish for goodness, in re-

fusing to put our wish into action, or to translate our prayers into the carrying of the daily cross. St. Paul was the apostle of justification by faith, yet just before his death he counted not himself to have apprehended. Of his Philippian converts he could highly and hopefully write, that He who had begun the good work in them would perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ. Yet of himself (and was it solely with respect to the fruits of his apostolate?) he wrote to the Corinthians, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means after I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" [1 Cor. ix. 27]. Who looked forward to the welcome of his Lord more ardently than he—"For me to depart and to be with Christ is far better"? [Phil. i. 23]. Yet in this same epistle, he prays that he may "know Christ, and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death" [Phil. iii. 10].

Let us not fear then to use the language, to share the misgivings, to accept the discipline, and to breathe the prayer of St. Paul. The Church needs saints. Let us all aim at more

personal sanctity. While salvation is instant deliverance from the consequences of sin, it is only a potential and gradual enfranchisement from its power. Conformity to Christ is the aim of every true heart that really loves Him ; and conformity is not reached in a day.

IN another way, already *Intercessory*
touched on in an espe- *prayer.*
cial feature of it, we may, each of us, though some may have more opportunity for it than others, glorify the Father, follow Christ, and help our brethren by continuous, secret, fervent, *intercessory* prayer. What a spring of power this is that all can touch ; for prevailing with One, only too willing to be entreated about it, for the illumination and conversion of the world. We all remember the man with one talent, and we seem often to come across him. Occasionally we recognize him in ourselves. Of course we dread even the idea of using prayer mechanically. We have heard that people in Thibet use prayer-mills, and the grotesque impiety has a possible side in it for us. Moreover, we must not forget that the desire to pray is a gift from God Himself,

usually anticipating His own purposed fulfilment. Still, what might be done in this way of intercessory prayer for the Church and the world, for the preaching of the Gospel, and the comforting of sorrowful hearts, and for the keeping of the innocent in their purity, and for the strengthening of the diligent in their useful lives ; by the poor, who have no money to give ; and the ignorant, who have no culture ; and the insignificant, who have no influence ; and the sick, who have no health ; and the leisurely, who have no absorbing occupation ; by the old, who will soon change prayer for praise, but who cannot finish their life-work better than by fulfilling their priestly office of prayer before the Lord for men. Oh ! what a strange, new force and baptism of the Spirit would come down upon us all, giving preachers a tongue of fire ; parents a holy wisdom with their children ; the Church a sort of spiritual resurrection ; the world an attentive and awakened ear. And it is ever open to us, always possible. The resource that never fails, the secret of all we need and desire—God waits to listen—we pause to use !

Then there is the fellowship of His sufferings, in which we, for His body's sake, the Church, may suffer, not only for our own blessedness, but for her edification, through the sight of the patience and faith so evidently imparted from Him. The faculty or capacity of mental pain is, I suppose, an essential and inalienable feature in a perfect moral being. It is inseparably bound up with that horror and grief at evil, when seen and felt, which is a very part of God's own nature, and of which, just in proportion to our individual share of it, we grieve to observe so little in ourselves. It is also indissoluble from that quality of sympathy in a loving and tender nature, which is the noble penalty of lovingness, and which, through making the sorrows of another our very own, thereby shares their anguish. In the glorified state this potential capacity of pain will, of course, be still an element in our nature, but dormant, since there will be nothing to call it into life. Now, there is this ennobling feature in the pain of a holy soul, that it can accept it, and even rejoice in it, both as the will of God, therefore beautiful and desirable; and as a

means of testifying to His faithfulness and tenderness in sustaining His saints as they walk in the furnace of trial, so that no smell of fire passes on them : and His nearness is even seen. One watching by the side of a suffering and now departed saint, whose simplicity and humility of nature made her quite unconscious of the lovely moral transfiguration that a long illness had produced in a character naturally beautiful, observed of her, after a long night's tedious pain borne with cheerful patience, "Now I know what the verse means, 'out of weakness were made strong'" [Heb. xi. 34]. That sick-bed was a pulpit. This is but one instance out of myriads. So long as we can serve God by activity, let us do so. When the time comes for manifesting Him in weakness and pain by the life of cheerful, dutiful, uncomplaining sonship, let us do so. It will be easier to do it if, in some measure, we can look back on not quiet a useless or unfruitful past. Patience is harder than diligence ; to sit still than to be moving. Yet the sick-room is often more powerful in its testimony of a faithful God, than a pulpit that sounds forth in sonorous eloquence the

message of the Gospel. How to use life we can all understand and do. How to meet death calmly and meekly is a lesson only to be learnt in one way.

WE, too, are to be the salt *Personal* and the light of the world; *influence.*

and we can be this only by our personal influence. We must not object to Christ's words to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, that they were ideal. Of course they are. How could they be anything else, coming from Him? How could anything less be suitable for us, who need lifting up in our low personal standard to the perfection of God?

To follow out the figure a little may help us to understand what Christian influence means. The use of salt is to preserve and flavour food; and so it is the blessed and noiseless function of our holy religion to show that goodness is at once possible and beautiful by the steady effort to exemplify it in our own lives.

The Church, no doubt, does this in her corporate existence; but the body cannot be

stronger or wiser than the members of which it is composed. While there is a charm, and a dignity, and a sense of oneness and sympathy in corporate action and fellowship, there is a snare in it and a peril with it. If ever we are tempted to think our brother's zeal, and charity, and wisdom sufficient to compensate for our own lack of them, we may discover to our cost, that while it is good for him to be rich, it is not safe for us to be poor. Also, it may be far better for us never even to look at work for Christ, much less to begin seriously to grapple with it, if we intend to regard our share in it simply as the amiable diversion of a vacant hour, not a distinct call from Him to help Him with the salvation of souls.

Christians are the salt of the earth in two ways ; and the second does not always complete the first. By the fact of their privilege, and the use of their grace. Our privilege, coming to us through the proffered adoption in baptism, is this, " Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you " [2 Cor. iii. 16]. Springing from this our duty is the eager, steady, and

faithful use of that grace which comes to us through our spiritual incorporation into Christ, and our close fellowship with Him. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" [John iv. 14]. In this figure of a well, with a constant supply from which others may drink for refreshment and life, is the mystery of the reproductive principle in a devout Christian soul—not only the indwelling, but the outgoing force of the Divine presence, the witness of regeneration and its result; indicating the duty, inspiring the motive, and supplying the power.

Are we the salt of the earth? In other words, do we care enough for this grace (blessed Gospel that this is) constantly to ask for it, gratefully to receive it, diligently to employ it, cheerfully to share it? Is our baptismal fellowship quickened and growing into a conscious and fruitful life?

SAY, let us be salt, and *Strength of*
in these ways. First, let *conviction.*
us act out our belief strenuously, inc-

santly, fearlessly, and as in the presence of God. What hamstrings every man in his Christian life is feebleness and limpness of conviction; and what weakens conviction is the spirit of the world. The one secret of enjoying everything worth having, and doing anything worth doing, is habitual communion with Christ. Live with Him, as well as for Him, and your love shall never wax cold. Then aim at individual work, *Individual* and should your heart slacken *work.*

about it, suspect your position with God. Each should pray and try to be personally useful to some one. That one helped and saved will be moved, just as you have been, to help and save others; and so the work grows by perpetually reproducing itself until the day dawns and the King of Saints comes back.

Sympathy. Then recollect the power of sympathy with others, both what it means and how it soothes the lonely and vexed spirit for the burdens and fatigues of life (see p. 126). It was the peculiar glory of Christ. Let it be yours for Him. It is not pity, nor bland condescension, nor sim

pering patronage. It is tender and delicate love. No doubt it comes to some much more easily than to others; yet we may pity the Christian who is quite devoid of it, and even more his friends. Christ's gifts are manifold, and each has his own. Yet with this no one can dispense. Ask for it, and it shall come.

Lastly, bear in mind that nothing in all the world will *Inconsistency.* mar your work or dim your glory like inconsistency. It is not, indeed, exactly to be called sin. Often it means the mere doing of things which are lawful, but not expedient, in a spirit of mere self-pleasing, saying, "Am I not free?" and then using our freedom, not as the servant of Christ. But the whiter the robe, the more darkly each spot shows on it. The constant reward of a holy and devoted life is the blessed atmosphere (a real spiritual glory) that constantly, though unconsciously, exhales from it. Much to be in communion with Christ means our taking Him, without knowing it, into every company we enter. The usefulness that never ceases, never irritates, is the irresistible charm of a holy example. Only a few can be clever, but all can be

good ; for God gives His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. To be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, is the glory of Sonship.

Conclusion. Finally, and as I would write these words on my knees, under a profound sense of their importance, so do you, Christian reader, ponder them on yours, that God may indeed show you if they are possible and true.

Christ is coming back : and as His life in Heaven is the pattern and representation of our glory, so is His life in us the measure of it. As He revealed the Father, and was His Father's glory, to the world in the accomplishment of His purpose, and in the function of His priesthood, we too are to reveal Him, as light shining in the dark places of the world, small, feeble, intermitting it may be, but still shining with the light of pure obedience and sweet charity. God wants us all, and we are to shine at our best. The salvation and illumination of the race does not depend so much on a little company of gifted saints flashing like light-houses at distant intervals over a gloomy ocean, as on millions and millions of

humble souls, of whom the world is both ignorant and unworthy, shedding their meek radiance, like the stars in the clear sky on the busy earth below. To be good, to be kind: this is to reveal the Father, and to confess the Son. Glorified humanity will chiefly be made up of a mass of insignificant people who have had humble duties, small resources, moderate gifts, slender opportunities, homely presence and limited scope, but who were dear to God, humbly followed Christ, and were faithful unto death. Let us not, then, think that there is nothing we can do wherewith to glorify God or help men's salvation. The life which has most of the future in it, as sustaining hope and motive, will best be able to meet the Master, when He comes to take account of His servants, will have the best multiplied talent to give Him as the usury of His grace. "Good and faithful servant"; oh, what a Gospel this will be to hear from Him! Now is the time to earn it; let us use the time well. Christ is coming back: and "Every one that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as He is pure" [1 John iv. 2]. Are we so purifying ourselves? We talk, some of

us a little glibly, of the joy of seeing Him. Let us ponder that joy with an unspeakable faith in His tender welcome, yet with a reverent and humble appreciation of our unspeakable unworthiness: and of how utterly inadequate our present conceptions must be, either of His awful holiness or our littleness in His sight. Oh, I know how good, how gracious, how gentle, how tender He is; but when I think of Him as the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His Person, and that one day these sinful eyes shall see Him, it is a Gospel of infinite gladness, tempered with an unspeakable and not unsuitable awe.

“I drew near to Him,
And He to me. O beatific sight!
O vision with which nothing can compare!
The Angel ministrant, who brought me hither,
Was exquisite in beauty, and my heart
Clave to his heart. . . .
But this was diverse from all other sights;
Not living only, it infused new life;
Not beautiful only, it beautified;
Not only glorious, for it glorified.
For a brief space methought I looked on Him,
And He on me. O blessed look! how brief

I know not, but Eternity itself
Will never from my soul erase the lines
Of that serene transfiguring aspect.
For a brief space I stood ; by Him upheld,
Gazing, and then in adoration fell,
And clasped His sacred feet. While holy tears,
Such tears as disembodied spirits may weep,
Flow'd from my eyes." *

We can, indeed, trust Him in that hour to be all that we need, more than ever we can ask or think, as He fills us with the rapture of His love, and looks us through and through with His countenance of holy searching tenderness. Yet it will be a marvellous moment when the sinner first meets and sees the Saviour who died for him. Doubtless the sense of sin will be swallowed up in the joy of redemption ; still the first gaze will surely be of penitence mingled with love.

Christ is coming back, and all the saints with Him. Who of us has not dear souls over there, who, in the dim distance of the past, went out into the invisible ? They are with Him, and they will return with Him ; they are with Him, and are also with us.

* " Yesterday, To-day, and Forever."

It is a characteristically delicate thought of a living theologian, that in our Father's house there are many resting-places; and that as here one vast roof over the common home covers, in its various and separated chambers, the diverse families of the household of faith, so as the ages go on, and our spiritual life progresses, both in the knowledge and service of God, we may move on and up from one mansion to another, from light to light, love to love, kingdom to kingdom, power to power.

This at least is certain. We are not really severed from those who sleep in Jesus. They are in one chamber, we in another; God visits us both. We cannot meet; that is all. We look to meet presently. If we want to make them happier, supposing that possible, the way to it is more and more to get our hearts like theirs, saturated with the love of Jesus. If we would make Heaven as blessed as possible for ourselves, let us do what we can by our usefulness now to fill it with thankful guests. Of all kinds of gratitude a human soul can know—and it cannot be fully known till Heaven is reached and Jesus seen—the deepest is the gratitude of a soul saved to the soul that saved it.

Reader, and this is my last question, Will that reward be yours?

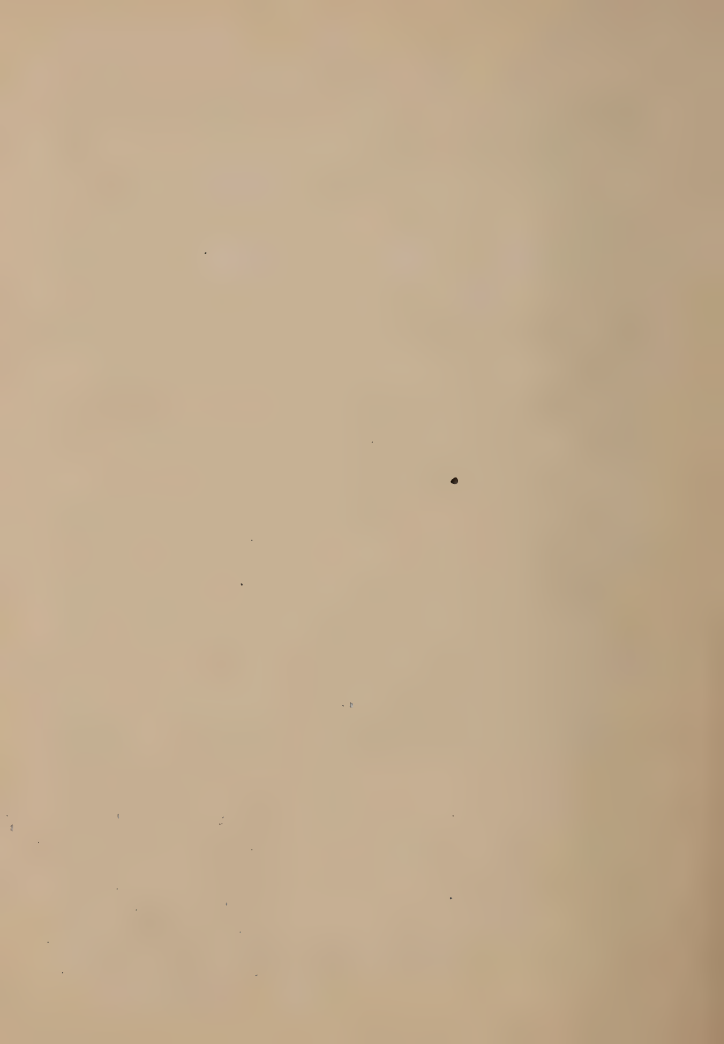
Dante, in his "Paradise," describes the court of the blessed as a "great white rose with innumerable leaves in innumerable ranks, one line of spotless spirits breaking upon one another," and the angels fluttering among them radiant with joy.

But we have a more sure word of prophecy: the Gospel of One who had seen that Holy Place, and left His record for the Church.

With this Gospel let us end:

"After this I beheld, and lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues, stood before the Throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes; and with palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation unto our God, which sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb"

[Rev. vii. 9, 10]



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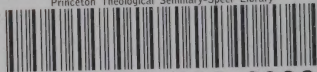
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